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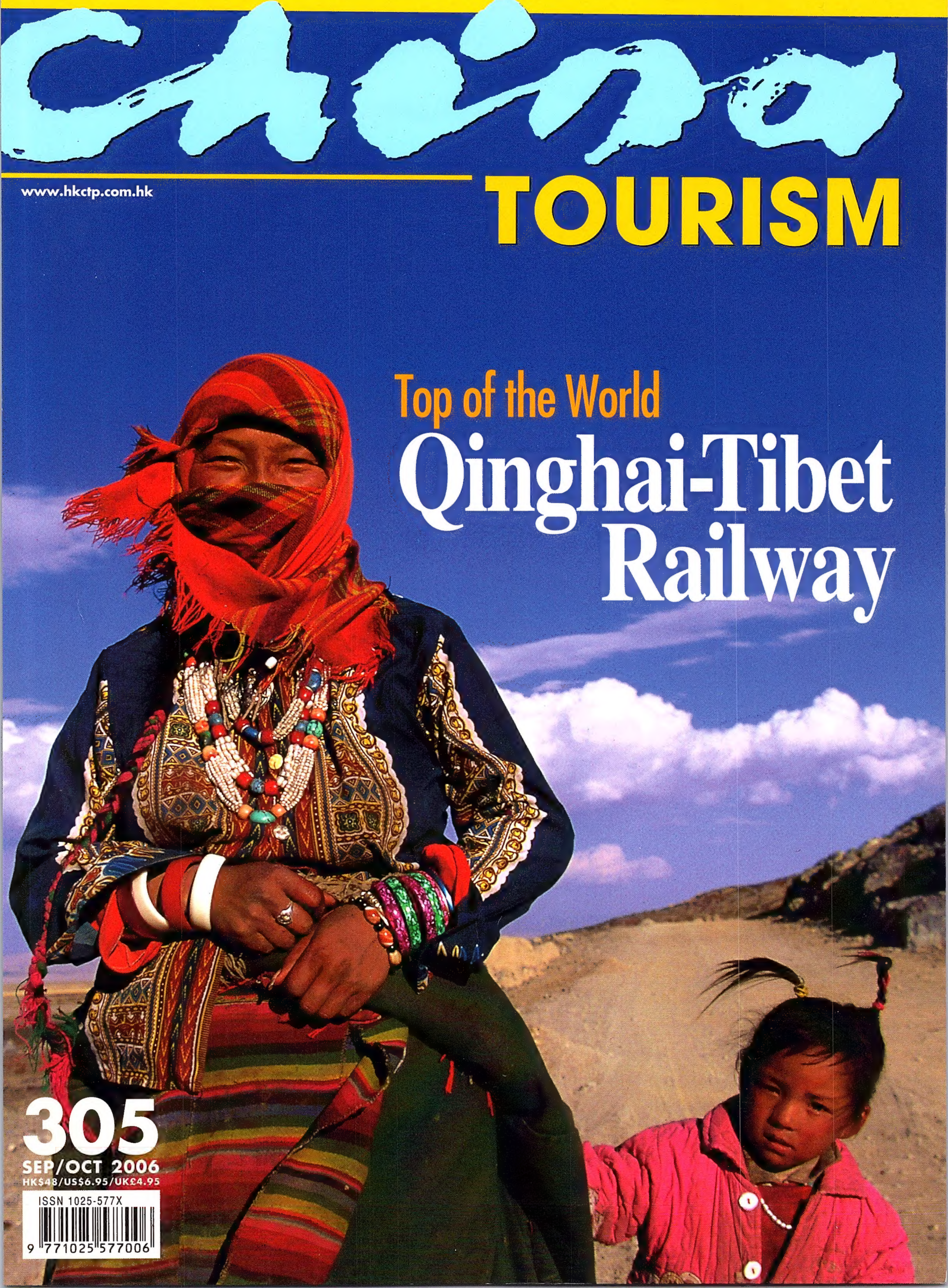

Top of the World

Qinghai-Tibet Railway

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SEP/OCT 2006

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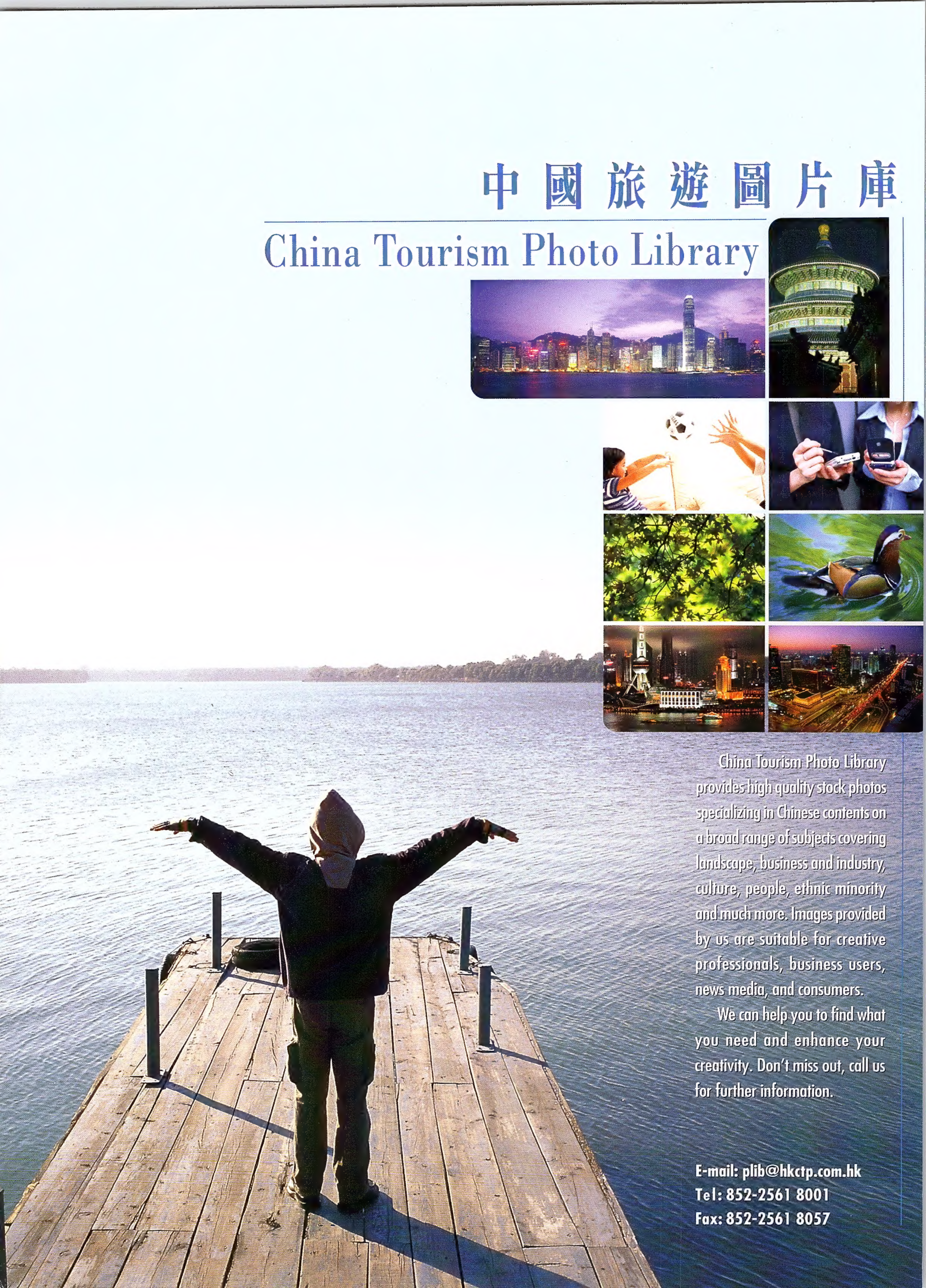

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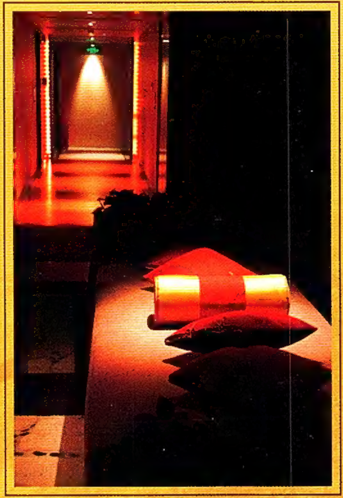

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Photos • Du Fangdong, Cheng Weidong, Stone, Jue Guo, Ma Yiu Chun, Liao Qin et al

Article • Shi Baoxiu, Cheng Weidong, Yang Xin, Ma Yiu Chun, Liao Qin

On July 1, 2006, the Chinese have made a history to mark the end of Tibet's isolation from the world of modern transportation — the official operation of the Qinghai-Tibet Railway, the world's highest among its kind. Our Deputy Editor-in-Chief Mr. Ma even took the train a few days later and presents to you an all-weather coverage of the railway route from Xining in Qinghai Province to Lhasa.

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Rebecca Lee — Still Me

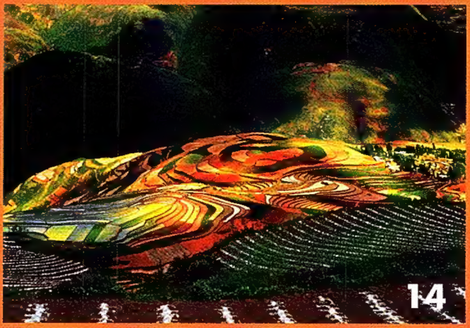
Photos • Wang Ling

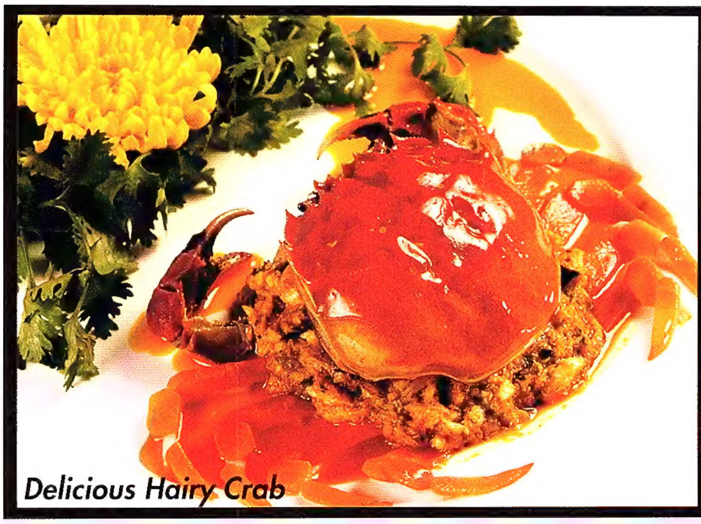
"Two years is not enough! I need five years to finish my work!" When Dr Rebecca Lee was diagnosed with intestinal cancer 2.5 years ago, she had this reply to her doctor. After all these years, she has gradually recovered, and talks about her will and proud to our readers.

97 Culture

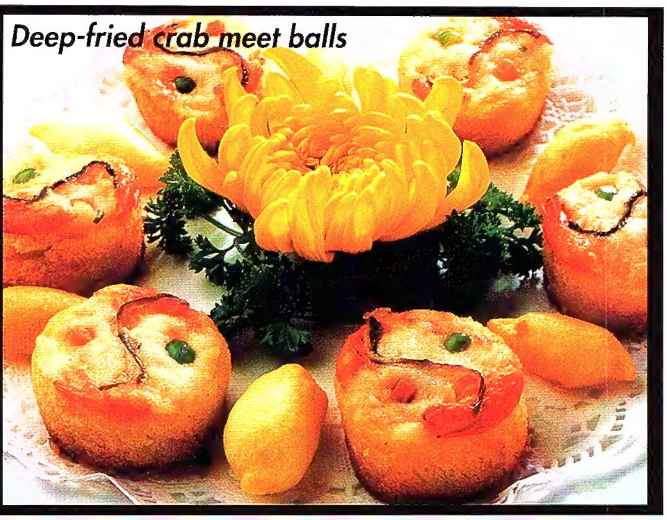
Charming Guqin

Photos & Article • Xie Guanghui





Delicious Hairy Crab



Deep-fried crab meet balls

Central Hotel Shanghai

The Ideal Place to Enjoy Hairy Crab

The local's diet is both delicate and thoughtful. It has kept some of the traditions while earning its name as a fusion of various Chinese cooking styles. Some dishes are so famous that they have become irreplaceable. The famous "Hairy Crab" is one of the exquisite examples. It'd be a regrettable experience if you were in Shanghai during the fall season but missed trying the crab. And it's very important to find the right restaurant to enjoy this crab. As now in Shanghai, if you ask a taxi driver: where is the ideal place to taste hairy crab? He is bound to tell you: The Central Hotel Shanghai!

Classical Banquet Hall

Conveniently located in downtown Shanghai's shopping and business district and adjacent to the Nanjing Road Pedestrian Mall, the Central Hotel Shanghai brings guests enough convenience for business, sightseeing, catering and entertainment purposes. The hotel possesses 27 floors and two levels of underground parking. It features total 319 luxuriously appointed guest rooms, 4 distinctly styled restaurants, bars and clubs, elegantly decorated banquet and meeting facilities, a fully out-fitted recreation centre, a well equipped beauty salon and an extraordinary sauna centre.

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Elegant Surrounding

The finely decorated Banquet Hall possesses 350 seating capacity and 9 private rooms named in classical Chinese poetry. It features delicate Huai Yang cuisine and crab dishes in the whole year. Starting from September to February of the following year, the renowned "Wang Bao He" crab feast is served here.

Quality Control Crab Purchasing

Every crab in Central Hotel is from the famous Yang Cheng Lake. The experienced hotel experts select every crab by hand to ensure that guests could taste the most fresh and delicious crab.

The Renowned "Wang Bao He" Crab Feast

In the renowned "Wang Bao He" Crab Feast, every dish is made of crab, even the dim sum. Our hotel chef creates new dishes every year, except for the branded dishes such as Sauteed crab meat, Deep-fried crab meet balls, Sauteed fish meat with noodles, Sauteed crab meat with potherb mustard and starch sheets and Deep fried shrimp balls in crab sauce.

Crab Tools

Back in the Ming Dynasty, Chinese people created a set of tools (total eight) when eating crab, now the Central Hotel ameliorated them into two fine tools but still keep all the functions.

Wang Bao He Yellow Wine

"Wang Bao He" is famous for the ancestor of the yellow wine and the king of hairy crab. The Wang Bao He yellow wine produced in Shaoxing is definitely the best choice while tasting the crab feast.

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Photos & Article • Mickey Ching

Being a weekend farmer in any of Taiwan's 300-more farms can be much fun — you will be offered fresh food, quaint environment, and more!

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Unwind at the Zhuhai's Islands

Photos • Adam Wong Article • Kristy Wong

Typical visitors to Zhuhai, a Guangdong city of 146 islands, will no doubt try feasting on oysters or soaking at hot springs. But for something different have you ever thought of touring its islands to experience the real charm of it?

132 Landscapes

Langshan Mountain — Walking on the Hunan-Guangxi Border

Photos • Lu Huibin, Huang Yanhong Article • Huang Yanhong

139 New Atractions

Golden Top of Mt Emei

Photos & Article • Suzan So

It's already tempting enough just to imagine the fictional descriptions of famous Buddhist land, Mt Emei. However, what really impresses the writer is the awe-inspiring grandeur of its newly refurbished "golden top".

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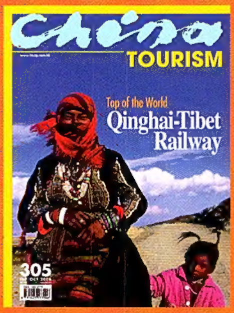

Cover: Tibetan mother and daughter (by Che Gang)

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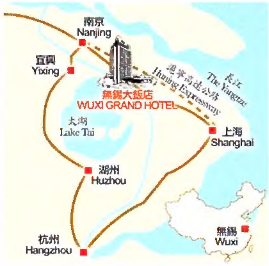
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The Road to HEAVEN

Every great achievement requires long-term, careful planning – sometimes it involves a huge input of manpower and capital investment. People may even end up sacrificing their lives, willingly or not, in pursuit of such goals.

The construction of the Qinghai-Tibet Railway is one such success story in China. The railway has overcome even the most difficult problem posed by the highland permafrost. Fortunately, under the "not one less" policy, no human life was "sacrificed" during the second phase of construction of this project, which started in July 2001. Five years later, in July 2006, the route between Golmud in Qinghai Province and Lhasa in the Tibet Autonomous Region was finally completed, making a long-cherished dream a reality. The Chinese people can be proud of the railway and the many world records it now holds. The triumph of its completion proves the saying "Where there's a will, there's a way."

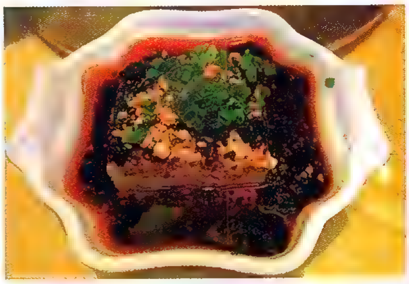
While the world welcomes and celebrates the new railway, environmentalists still worry that the ecology will be affected by the rapid modernization of the highland. Their concerns are valid and we must all do our part to preserve this environmentally sensitive region. Therefore, we urge visitors and locals to cherish this amazing natural treasure and all the sights along the rails.

(by Li Dan)

Sept **Tibet**

Bathing Festival

Held from the 6th to the 12th day of the 7th Tibetan month, Bathing Week coincides with the appearance in the sky of Venus, considered a sacred planet. Tibetans believe that at this time the water in the river becomes its purest and has curative powers, and its best for their fitness to take bath in this period. People will group together according to sex.



Sept 15~17 **Huainan, Anhui**

13th Bean Curd Culture Festival

Bagong (Eight Minsters) Mountain is the birthplace of Huainan's bean curd (also known as *tofu*) culture. Regarded as one of the greatest food invention in China, *tofu* is also recognized as an international healthful food by the world. Among the many events held during the festival, the tourism promotion is most attractive. Travellers from home and abroad are welcome to explore famous local sights including Huainan city, Wolong Mountain Scenic Area, Maoxian Cave Scenic Area, Bagong Mountain, etc.

Sept 21~27 **Hunan**

Zhangjiajie International Forest Festival

During the festival, tourists may join nature trails, rafting on the Maoyan River and take part in an international mountain-climbing and rock climbing invitationals. The local minority Tujia people will put on performances, practice *qigong* fist and perform rock climbing. Zhangjiajie is an enchanting tropical paradise in northwestern Hunan Province, with local hotspots including the Wulingyuan Scenic Area, a UNESCO World Heritage since 1992, Jinbian Brook, Huangshizhai, Pipa Brook, etc.

2006

SEPT/OCT

Oct 5 ~ 10 **Taoyuan Air Force Base**

Taiwan Sports Air Show

Organized by the Taoyuan County Government, Ministry of National Defense, Ministry of Transportation and Communications, Ministry of Economic Affairs, and the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, the one held in this year will display the achievements in national defense technology, aviation industry, aerospace development, recreational flying and interesting flight related sports.

Sept 15~22 **Shanxi**

6th Pingyao Int'l Photography Festival (PIP)

Acclaimed as "the precious stage for international photographers to display their talents", the PIP has been successfully held for 5 years. Pingyao, located in Shanxi Province in Central China, is the sole ancient city with the Hans' style in China listed as a UNESCO World Cultural Heritage. Shanxi, well-known as "Museum of Chinese Ancient Architecture" and "Chinese Ancient Art Treasury", is one of the most important birthplaces of Chinese civilization.

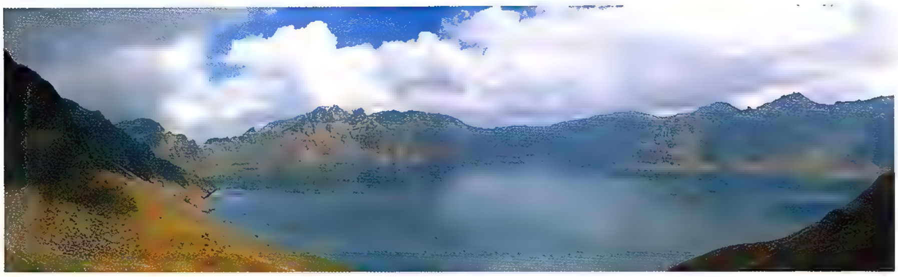
Website: www.pipphoto.com/en

Oct 6 ~ Nov 5 **Macau**

20th Macau Music Festival

The 20th Macau International Music Festival (MIMF) is celebrated with a touch of romanticism. Jazz, classical, electronica, Chinese folk-pop, rock and fado will fill Macau's autumn nights with magic. Such noble Macau venues as the Dom Pedro V Theatre and the Lou Lim Ieoc Garden have received many indelible names in the arts.

Website: www.icm.gov.mo/fimm



Colourful Performance in Heavenly Lake

In July, the beautiful Heavenly Lake (Tianchi), located in Mt Changbai in Northeast China's Jilin Province, rang with the melodious rhythm of songs and dances. The 100 national songs and dances performances in the Heavenly Lake scenic spot will fully display its charm to the coming tourists.

Starting from July 5, there will be one performance everyday in the coming 100 days (until early October). During this period, the tourists coming to the Heavenly Lake can appreciate the colourful national songs and dances with strong flavours, an ideal way to equip them with minority cultural knowledge.

Call for Urgent Protection for Great Wall

Recently non-governmental organization China Great Wall Society warns that parts of the wall may collapse and disappear in the near future unless protection efforts are improved. Only about 20 per cent of the 6,300-km wall is in reasonable shape, another 30 per cent is in ruins, and the rest has disappeared permanently. The damage was caused by weathering, erosion and human damage.

Fortunately, the Beijing Municipal Mapping Research Institute has finished the location work for 130 watch-towers along the Great Wall and 10 important sites in its Beijing section. Archeologists have marked all these places on a map with a scale of 1: 10000. Experts say the work will serve as important reference for scientists to mark out an area of the Great Wall for protection in future.

Mandarin to Be Promoted Globally

Chinese State Councilor Chen Zhili has called for better promotion of Mandarin learning around the world in a bid to meet surging demand and expand the influence of Chinese culture in the world.

The country has decided to train more teachers, improve textbooks and build more Confucius institutes overseas and on-line which specialize in Chinese language and culture education.

2006
世遺護照
HERITAGE PASSPORT

Macau Heritage Passport Successes

Macau Heritage Passport, a tourism promotion campaign, is well received by tourists as 5,500 "passports" have been distributed, since the launch of the campaign on July 1.

Macau Heritage Passport, as a core campaign of the Macau World Heritage Year, aims to encourage the spending by visitors while promoting Macau's world heritage sites. Some 140 hotels and businesses are participating in this campaign. Participating visitors have to obtain their "passports" at MGTO information counters at the listed hotels in Macau before they enter an instant lucky draw by presenting the four stamps collected according to instructions on "the passports."

Website: www.macautourism.gov.mo/en

Shanghai to Have Sightseeing Buses

Tourists may have more ways to explore Shanghai as a company is planning to open a double-decker bus sightseeing route for visitors around Nanpu Bridge, Huaihai Road, and the Bund. The buses will be equipped with foreign language guides, aiming to attract more foreign customers. The buses will have an open upper deck with no roof and shallow sides and the bottom level will be air-conditioned. Each bus will cost approximately one million yuan (US$125,000), as its chassis and engine are imported from overseas countries.

Garden Hotel to Reopen in October

Garden Hotel, one of the most famous five-star hotels in Guangzhou, East China's Guangdong Province, has stopped receiving customers from August 10 to October 10. During the two months, the hotel will have its largest ever fitting up since it started operation 21 years ago.

The decoration includes upgrading some of its facilities and adding new functions. According to the plan, the hotel will reduce its numbers of rooms from 1,070 to 500 or 700. Later this year, the hotel will compete for the title of Platinum Five-Star Hotel.

"Impression Lijiang" to Promote the Ancient City

After two years' planning and preparation, the second outdoor production of China's leading film director Zhang Yimou was debuted in late July at the foot of the Jade Dragon Snow Mountain in West China's Yunnan Province.

"Impression Lijiang" is the first part, with the other part, called "Ancient City Impression", to be staged at the Dayan Ancient Town, a world heritage site. Around 500 local people from 10 ethnic groups have been selected from 16 towns and villages in Lijiang of Yunnan Province to perform daily folk songs, dances and rituals for tourists. Most audience interviewed said they had seen nothing like it before and almost all the audience was "moved" or "inspired".

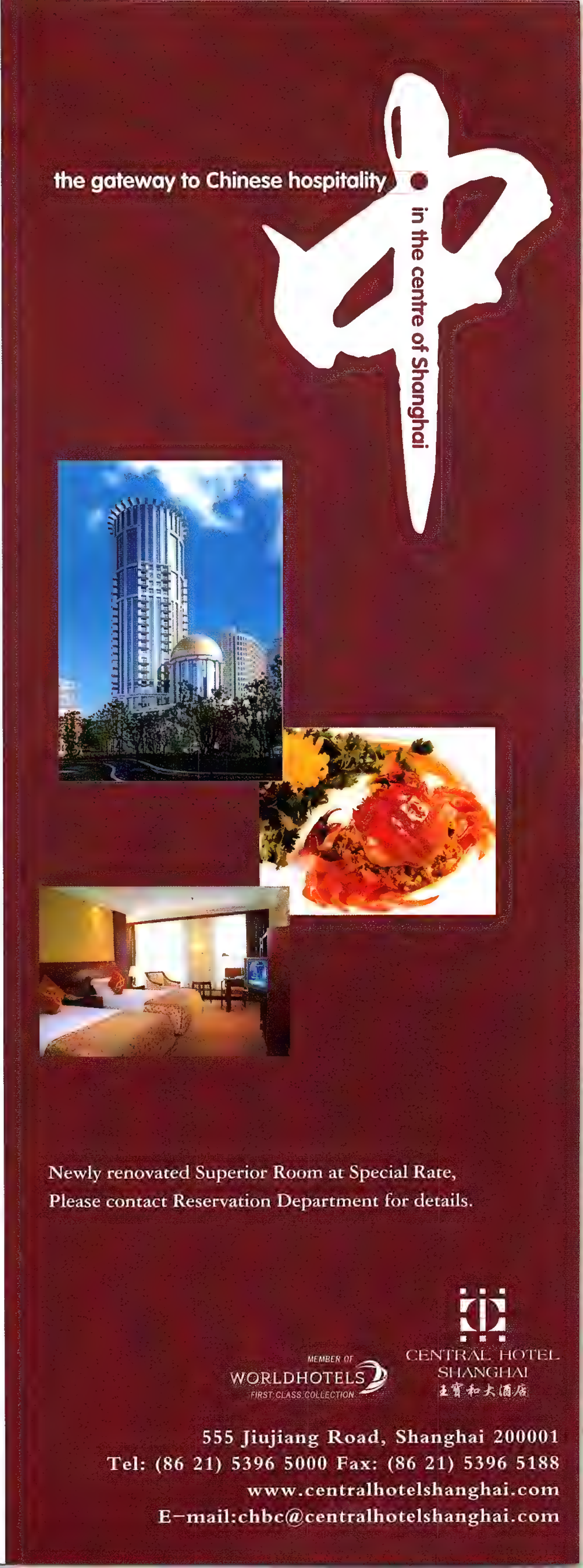
In 2003, Zhang and his two assistants created the first installment of their out-door "Impression" series, "Impression Liu Sanjie," in Yangshuo, a world-renowned scenic resort in Guangxi Zhuang Autonomous Region. By the end of this June, the performance has attracted more than one million audiences and annually turned in nearly 100 million yuan.

Legal System for Honesty in Tourism

Over the next three to five years, China will establish a better and more comprehensive legal system to ensure honesty and reliability in the tourism industry, according to a source from the China National Tourism Administration (CNTA). The government will continue to revise regulations and urges more provinces to pass laws regulating tourism.

Residents in Mt Lushan to Be Removed

In order to protect Mt Lushan, a UNESCO world-cultural heritage since 1996, from pollution, the government of Jiujiang in Jiangxi Province has decided to relocate the 12,000 residents there in a two-square-kilometres new district at Fanglan Village in Jiujiang in the next three years. Construction of this new district will start in the second half of 2006, and be completed by 2008.



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Beijing

Peking University Bans Tourists Visits

The country's most prestigious educational institution has had enough of being a tourist attraction all these years, and has recently decided to ban all tour groups from the campus. The exceptions are individual visitors and groups of high school students organized by educational institutions as long as they secure permission from the university's security department three days in advance.

Aviation

CAAC to cancel 584 flights

The General Administration of Civil Aviation (CAAC) said in early July that 584 flights scheduled to leave Beijing's Capital Airport will be cancelled between July 15 and September 25. The cancellations are for the sake of flight safety and the normal operation of airports across the country. The 584 flights are mostly between 5 p.m. and 8 p.m., the period when thunderstorms are most likely to occur in Beijing.

Travel

New Version of Railway Tickets Issued

The railway stations of Nanchang, Fuzhou, Xiamen and Ganzhou have updated their ticketing systems since June, as expected to ease the purchase process of railway tickets. There are several changes on the face of the new tickets, including information that marks discounted and preferential tickets. There are also "red tour" tickets among the new tickets. Marked with the Chinese character "hong" (紅red), the tickets will take passengers to China's revolutionary sites.

Xinjiang

Urümqi-Narati Airline Launched

The new airline is good news to those who want to travel to the famous Kanas Lake and Narati Grassland during a trip to Xinjiang, as the two attractions lie over 1,000 km apart. Tourists can take plane from Xinjiang's capital, Urümqi, to Narati to experience the beauty of the vast grassland and the life of herdsman, then take a bus to Ili, from where they take plane to fly to Altay. After arriving at Altay, they can take a bus to Kanas Lake.

Aviation

Authority Approves to Build Four New Airports

The National Development and Reform Commission (NDRC) has approved the construction of four civilian airports, which will cost 1.618 billion yuan (US$202 million). The four to-be-built airports will be constructed in Kangding and Leshan airports, located in Sichuan Province in Southwest China, Tengchong in Yunnan Province, and Daqing in Heilongjiang Province in Northeast China. The country is expected to spend 140 billion yuan on airport construction in the next five years. It plans to expand and renovate 27 large and medium-sized airports during the five-year period. There are currently 142 civilian airports on the Chinese mainland.

Anhui

Huangshan Sets Overseas Tourist Office

Huangshan, a scenic city in East China's Anhui Province, famous for its imposing Huangshan (better known as Yellow Mountain), has chosen Seoul, capital of the Republic of Korea (ROK), for its first overseas tourism office.

The city government had erected road signs in Korean at popular scenic spots on the Huangshan Mountain and major highways, and tour guides were being encouraged to learn Korean. The ROK has become the biggest foreign market for Huangshan, which drew 100,000 Korean tourists in 2005.

Sichuan

Panda Habitat Included as World Heritage

Members of the 30th session of the World Heritage Committee (WHC) has agreed to put China's giant panda habitat on the World Heritage List, making it the 35th Chinese site included in the list.

Chinese governments of all levels have made long-time effort in protecting the rare giant pandas and their habitat, which covers an area of 9,245 sq km between Daduhe and Minjiang in southwestern Sichuan Province. The inclusion is of great significance in better protecting rare animal species such as golden-haired monkeys, antelopes aside from giant pandas, as well as plant species whose numbers are more than 10,000 kinds in the area. The giant pandas and their habitat will be protected in the future not only in accordance with Chinese law but also international law.

Experts also said urgent improvements needed to be made to protect the site, proposing that the construction of water plants, roads and other development inside the habitat be controlled.

Fujian/Taiwan

Third Sea Link Between Fujian and Taiwan Opens

This is the third such sea link between the Chinese mainland and the region of Taiwan. The other routes, between Xiamen/Jinmen and Mawei/Mazu, were opened in 2001. The new passenger-only route will tighten economic ties across the Taiwan Straits and opens a doorway to direct shipping services between the Chinese mainland and the main island of Taiwan.

Tibet

Nyingchi Airport Operates

Nyingchi Airport, the third airport in Tibet has put into operation at the beginning of July. It plans to carry 12,000 passengers every year. Locating at 2,954 metres above the sea level, Nyingchi Airport is the lowest airport in Tibet. As scheduled, Southwest Branch of Air China will open a flight course between Chengdu and Nyingchi. The other two airports in Tibet are the Lhasa Gonggar Airport and Chamdo Bangda Airport

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Falling for the Red Earth

Photos • Huang Guowei Article • Zhou Demin

Having been fascinated by the terraced fields in Yuanyang some while, I later discovered the Red Earth in Yunnan. It is a place crowned with calmness and serenity and embraced by diligent and simple-minded villagers who work from dawn to dust. For half a decade, I have visited the place thirty times. The strong and pure fragrance of humanity has made me particularly fond of that place.

Snaking around hilly roads for four hours from Kunming, I am dazzled by the awe-inspiring view of Yunnan-Guizhou Plateau. Slowly I land myself on Huashitou (Floral Rock) Village, Xintian County of Dongchuan Prefecture, around 100 km north of Kunming. The villagers can be numbered. I intentionally make myself one of them — indulging myself in the stress-free life there.

Xintian County shares the topography of Yunnan Plateau. The interaction of climate, ecology, geology as well as geography has produced a vast piece of red earth — making it one of the most typical and concentrated kind in the Yunnan Plateau. At 2,890 metre, the place is blessed with temperate climate and a small annual range of temperature. Rainbows are often found after rain and snow lasts only couple days in winter. The mountain ranges offer a view with no end. The mountain valleys are woven with creeks and streams and accessible pathways.

Hiring a horse-drawn wagon to tour around offers you a leisurely afternoon amidst the mountains. You can get glimpses into the hard-labour of the farmers, the ever-changing clouds, the luring burgundy-red soil and the harvests hills of all sizes. With few tourists coming to the region, Red Earth remains a traditional farming village. Neither mineral mines nor factories could be found there. Rather, you will constantly run into all kinds of farm products: oilseed rapes, taros, maize, sorghums, buckwheat and peas. The fields, thus, change their colors according to different harvesting seasons. The radiant red makes spring irresistible. The ploughing of farmers often leaves blood-shot wavy lines on the fields, which make the snow-white buckwheat flowers more outstanding.

Each field of the Red Earth is a decorative piece of art. The bush-green, sand-like yellow, sky-blue and golden of the fields embellish the rich lines in the terraces. Sometimes, you may spot an old lady wearing embroidered blue blouse working in the field. Her weathered face goes so well with the red earth fields. Sometimes, you may even spot her embroidered dainty shoes on her once-bounded feet. Despite that, she still works diligently in the farm. All these is like a harmonious picture of man and nature on canvass.

Red earth, perhaps, is not necessarily the most gorgeous place on earth. Every time when I visited there, however, I would hear villagers warmly greet me: "It is you again!" To whom I would reply, "Yes, it's me. How are you?"

Translated by Dora Tsang

Travel Tips:

Transportation:

There are two ways to get to Red Earth from Kunming. One option is to get on a bus at the transport depot east of Kunming which goes to Dongchuan. The 165 km-long drive takes three hours and costs 28 yuan. Upon arriving the town of Dongchuan, change to another bus that goes to Ma Jie (Horse Street) and get off at Huashitou Village in Xintian County. The ride takes two hours and costs 15 yuan. This road condition is good yet takes longer time to travel. This option is more suitable for people who plan to drive there or hire a car to go there.

Another option is to get on the bus which goes to Fazhe from Dongju transport depot in Kunming. Get off the bus at Huashitao Village. The road condition is poorer here and takes a bit more than five hours to travel.

The farthest scenic spot of the Red Earth takes a 11-km ride. You can hire a car for 150 yuan per day.

Accommodation:

Red Earth Guesthouse

10 yuan/ person Tel: (871) 2568 598 / 133 5490 9125

Dongchun Travel Photographers' Home

10 yuan/ person Tel: (871) 6887 994

Note: The owner Mr. Zhang Kaiquan is very familiar with the areas for taking good pictures. You can ask him to become your tour guide. Many photographers who go to the Red Earth choose to stay in his guesthouse.

1

Linzi

Birthplace of Football

Photos & Article • Wang Jing

Four years after Japan and Korea, the World Cup Football Championship took place in this June, which again brought forth great fervor of football all over the world. However, football did not first originate in the football kingdom Brazil or France but in China, a country that had missed the finals round this year. The placein question is Linzi of Northeast China's Shandong Province and it happened more than 2,300 years ago during the Warring States period.

During the World Cup this year, an "exhibition of entertaining football" was open to all the football fans in Hamburg. Among all the exhibition items are a replica of *cuju* (蹴鞠), a *cuju* goal and stone engravings of *cuju*, all provided by Linzi of Shandong. This *cuju* is the prototype of modern football.

The Earliest Football City

At the third China International Football Exhibition in 2004, the President of FIFA, Blatter declares to the public that "football first started in China". And Velappan, General Secretary of the Asian Football Confederation, concurs and announces that the city of Zibo of Shandong, China is the earliest football city.

The museum is divided into two parts, with altogether 10 exhibition units. On display one finds 150 invaluable items, more than 300 historical photos and more than 20 reproduced scenes, all of which form a systematic introduction to the origin, development and dissemination of football.

Football became a popular competitive sport as early as the Western Han and later spread to Egypt, Greece, Rome, France and finally to Britain. According to the Miscellaneous Notes by Liu Xiang of the Western Han, football was first invented by the Yellow Emperor. In the past, football was called *cuju* or *taju*. *Cu* and *ta* denote "kick" while *ju* is a synonym for "ball", meaning leather-made bouncing item filled with hair.

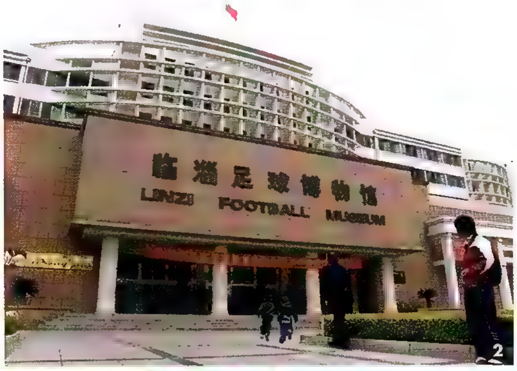
Cuju was very popular in Linzi from the Warring States period through Western Han, a total of 300~400 years.

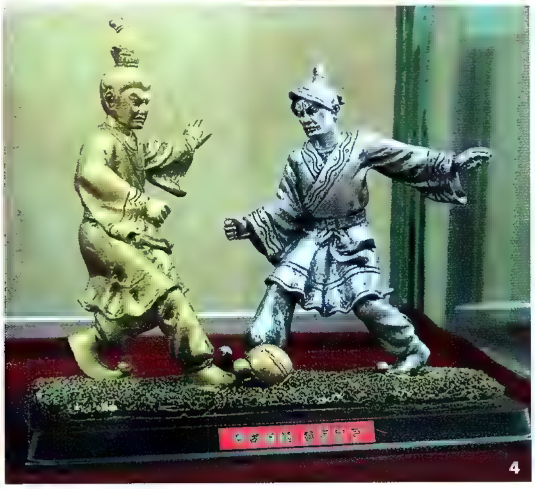
Play Football to Death

The fans' fervor of football nowadays is hardly comparable to that of the past. As recorded in the *Book of History*, Chunyu Yi, a physician in Linzi, notes down one of the earliest written record of medical diagnosis as follows: Xiang Chu, a local of Linzi and football fan, succumbed to a grave disease and sought Chunyu Yi for help. Chunyu Yi, upon giving him the prescription, advised him against participating in any activity that should make him perspire. However, Xiang Chu's love for football exceeded his care for his own health. Even when he was still sick, he could not resist the temptation of playing a little football. After a bout of *cuju*, he came back with sweat all over his body and died shortly afterwards. To risk one's life for football — that is how popular *cuju* was in the Western Han and how the people of Linzi loved it.

In the museum, the visitor gets to see the changes in the shape and pattern of football, from *cuju* of the high antiquities to Teamgeist of today; from the earliest four-piece binding to the round-shaped football nowadays; from unorganised football skirmishes in the past to formal football matches. Perhaps more importantly, one will get to see some of the earliest champion trophies and football pitches and rules and everything else about the long history of football.

Translated by Hu Jun





1. A reproduction of a football match in the past. The dragon goal is on the right side.

2. Exterior of the Linzi Football Museum.

3. Football made of four pieces of leather.

4. Ancient football clothings.

5. Ancient football match judge.

Travel Tips

Linzi area of Zibo owns a history of more than 800 years and a large number of historical remains. The old city of Linzi and its surrounding area are filled with cultural heritage: Museum of the History of Qi Kingdom, Horse-Sacrificing Hole of the Eastern Zhou Dynasty, National Museum of Ancient Vehicles and many more. Therefore, Zibo is sometimes also known as the "underground museum".

Transportation:

By air: From Hong Kong (ca. $2,600 HKD, single journey), Shenzhen (ca. 1,360 yuan, single), Guangzhou (ca. 1,270 yuan, single), Shanghai (ca. 610 yuan, single), Beijing (ca. 500 yuan, single) and other major cities all have flights to Jinan, capital city of Shandong Province.

By train: Guangzhou, Shanghai, Beijing all have trains bound for Jinan. From Jinan, there are trains to Zibo.

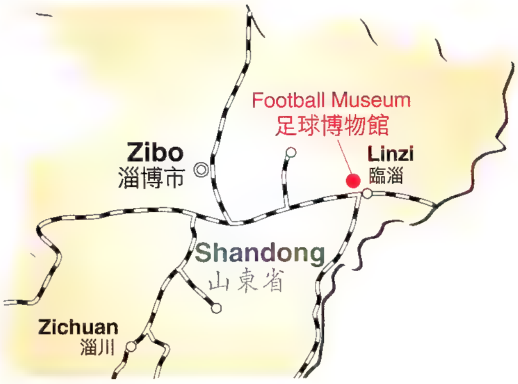
By bus: There are buses from Jinan to Zibo. One bus every 15 minutes. Fare costs 28 yuan and it takes about 90 minutes. Upon arriving in Zibo, take another bus to Linzi. Buses operate from 5:30 a.m. to 6:30 p.m., one bus every few minutes. Fare costs 3.5 yuan. From Linzi to the Football Museum, take the No. 20 bus and get off at :provincial government:.

Accomodation: There are a few star-rated hotels in Linzi:

Qidu Hotel (four stars), Tel: (533) 719 8888

Wenyun Kaiyue Hotel (three stars), Tel: (533) 716 8698

In addition, there are household pensions with standard rooms priced around 50~80 yuan.



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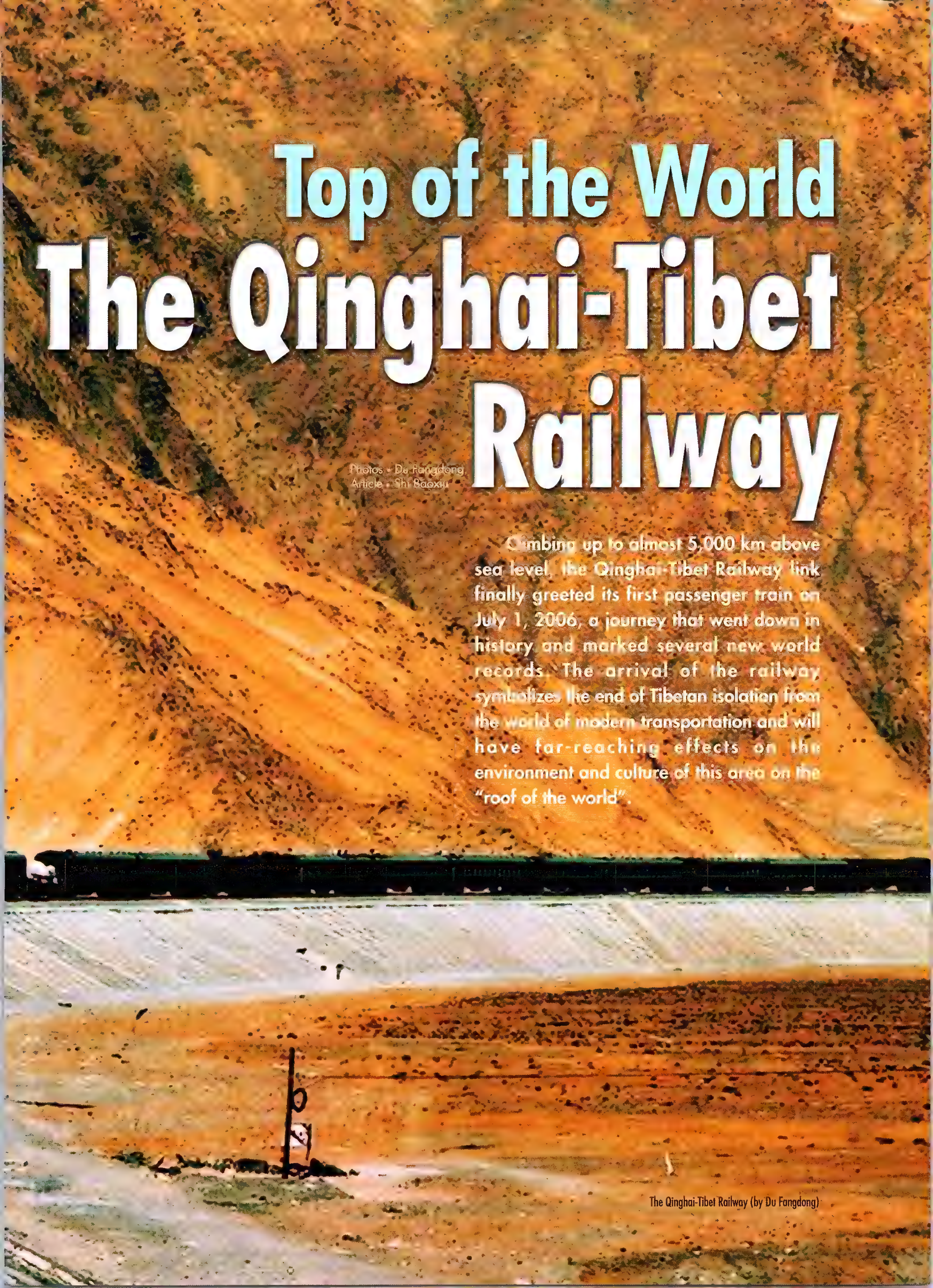


Top of the World

The Qinghai-Tibet Railway

Photos • Du Fangdong
Article • Shi Baoxiu

Climbing up to almost 5,000 km above sea level, the Qinghai-Tibet Railway link finally greeted its first passenger train on July 1, 2006, a journey that went down in history and marked several new world records. The arrival of the railway symbolizes the end of Tibetan isolation from the world of modern transportation and will have far-reaching effects on the environment and culture of this area on the "roof of the world".

The Qinghai-Tibet Railway (by Du Fangdong)

[History]

The history of land transportation between Tibet and the outside world extends far back into Chinese history. As early as the mid-seventh century, an ancient road linking Tang Dynasty capital Xi'an in Shaanxi Province and the Qinghai-Tibet Plateau was established.

In the mid-13th century, the Mongol emperor of Yuan Dynasty dispatched troops to Tibet to establish a local authority and from this time the Qinghai-Tibet Plateau became part of the Chinese empire. The direct consequence was the establishment of the Tibetan road from Golmud across the Kunlun Mountain range and into the Qiangtang Plateau.

In the 1930s and 1940s, Chiang Kai-shek planned a highway from Xining in Qinghai Province to Lhasa along roughly the same course as the ancient road in the Tang Dynasty. However, due to difficulties in surmounting the treacherous frozen earth landscape and the pressing needs of resources to resist the Japanese invasion, the project was abandoned.

The next stage of work was a highway begun in the 1950s, this time along the Yuan Dynasty route from Xining to Golmud and across the Kunlun, Tanggula and Nyainqêntanglha Mountain Ranges to Lhasa. The 1,700-km highway was completed within four years. For the first time, cars could ascend to the "roof of the world".

In the late 1950s work begun on the Qinghai-Tibet Railway. However, due to shortages in finances, insurmountable natural obstacles, and delays caused by changes in the political situation, progress on the railway was slow. Over 20 years, the railway was opened in stages, first from Xining to Huangyuan, then continued westward to Hairag, Hoh Salt Lake and Golmud. Finally in 1984 the railway was connected to Golmud completing the 846-km first stage.

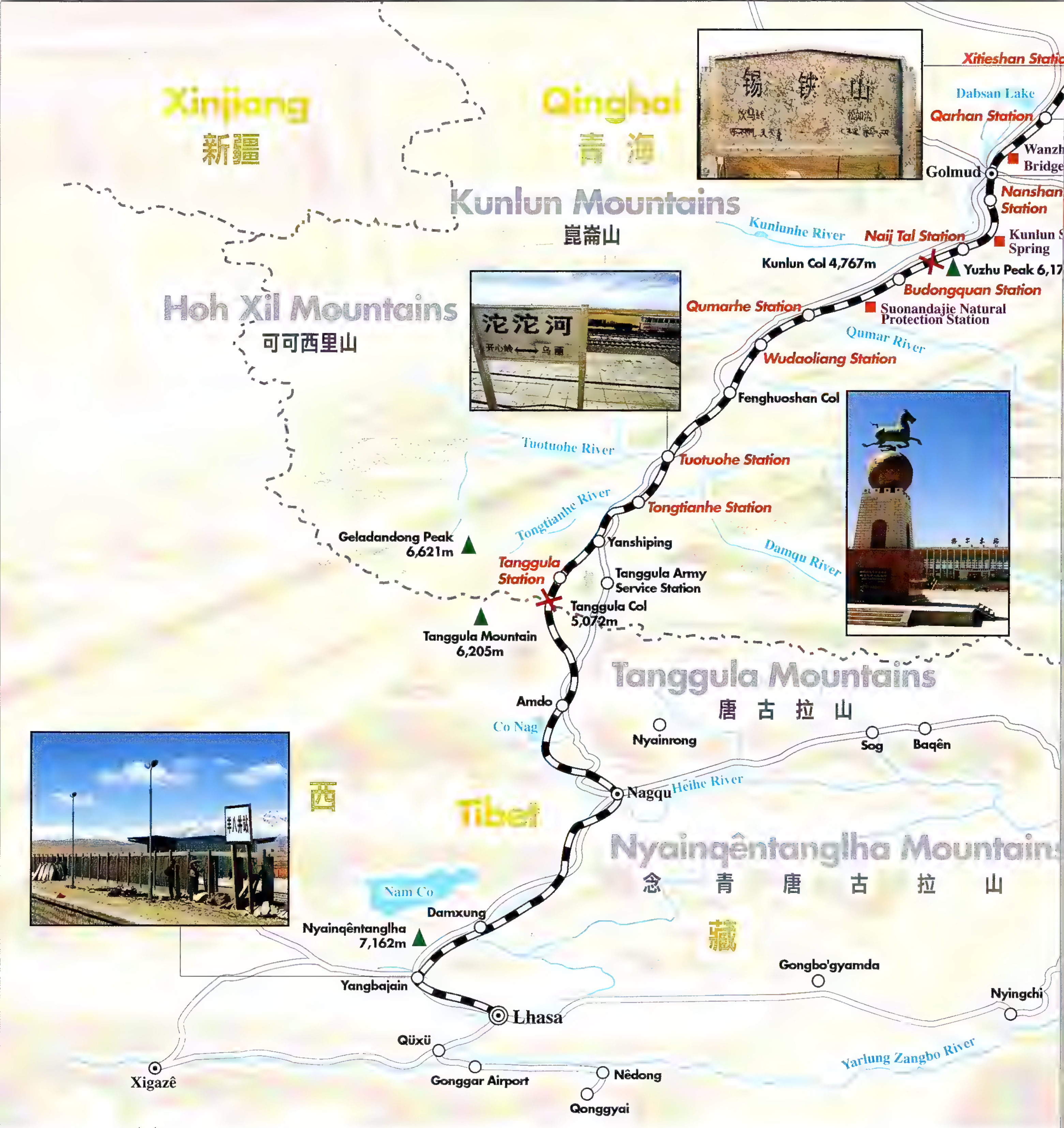
Altitude and Frozen Earth Challenges

Due to difficulties posed by the altitude and frozen earth on the high plateau, the remaining stage of the railway connection to Lhasa was postponed for many years.

But finally after 23 years, work was begun on the line between Golmud and Lhasa in July 2001. Due to improvements in railway engineering technique and equipment, the 1,1000-km line work across over 600 km of frozen earth 5,000 metres above sea level was completed in less than four years. On 12 October 2005, the track work was completed and on July 1, 2006 the line hosted its first passenger train.

Over 1,360 years had passed between the first ancient Tang Dynasty road to Tibet and the railway link that stands before us today.

Crossing the Qinghai-Tibet Plateau at over 4,000 metres, the railway construction faced year round snow, steep mountains and treacherous rivers, frozen earth and numerous earth tremors, but finally the highest railway in the world was opened in July 2006. (by He Yanguang)


Xinjiang
新疆
Qinghai
青 海
锡 铁 山
Xitieshan Statio
Dabsan Lake
Qarhan Station
Wanzh
Bridge
Golmud
Nanshan
Station
Kunlun Mountains
崑崙山
Kunlunhe River
Naij Tal Station
Kunlun S
Spring
Kunlun Col 4,767m
Yuzhu Peak 6,17
Budongquan Station
Suonandajie Natural Protection Station
Hoh Xil Mountains
可可西里山
沱沱河
开心岭 ⟷ 乌丽
Qumarhe Station
Qumar River
Wudaoliang Station
Fenghuoshan Col
Tuotuohe River
Tuotuohe Station
Tongtianhe River
Tongtianhe Station
Geladandong Peak
6,621m
Yanshiping
Damqu River
Tanggula Station
Tanggula Army Service Station
Tanggula Col
5,072m
Tanggula Mountain
6,205m
Tanggula Mountains
唐 古 拉 山
Amdo
Co Nag
Nyainrong
Sog
Baqên
西
Tibet
Nagqu
Heihe River
羊八井站
Nyainqêntanglha Mountain
念 青 唐 古 拉 山
Nam Co
Damxung
Nyainqêntanglha
7,162m
藏
Gongbo'gyamda
Yangbajain
Nyingchi
Lhasa
Qüxü
Xigazê
Gonggar Airport
Nêdong
Qonggyai
Yarlung Zangbo River

Altitudes

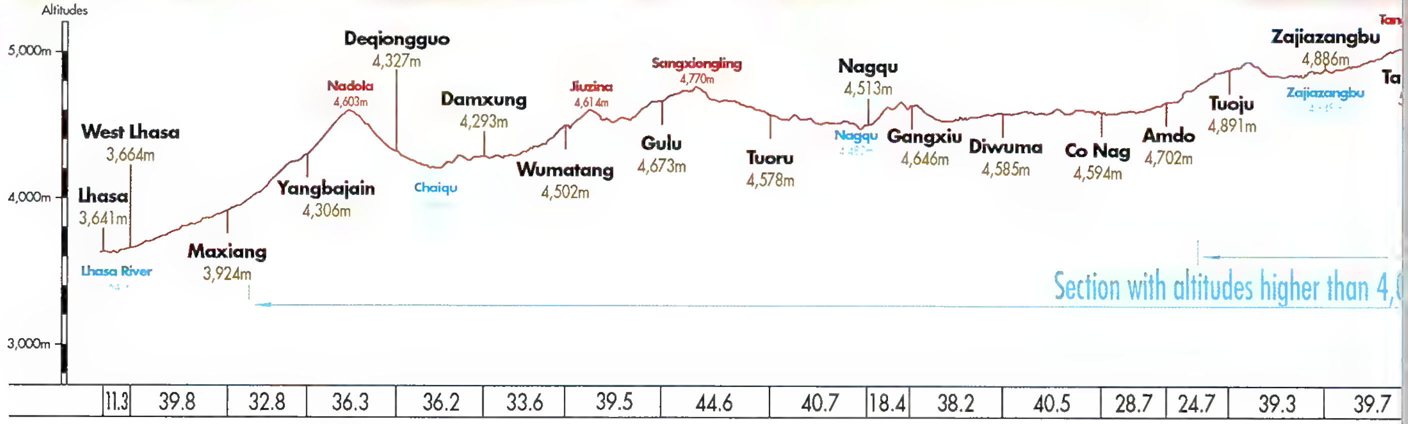
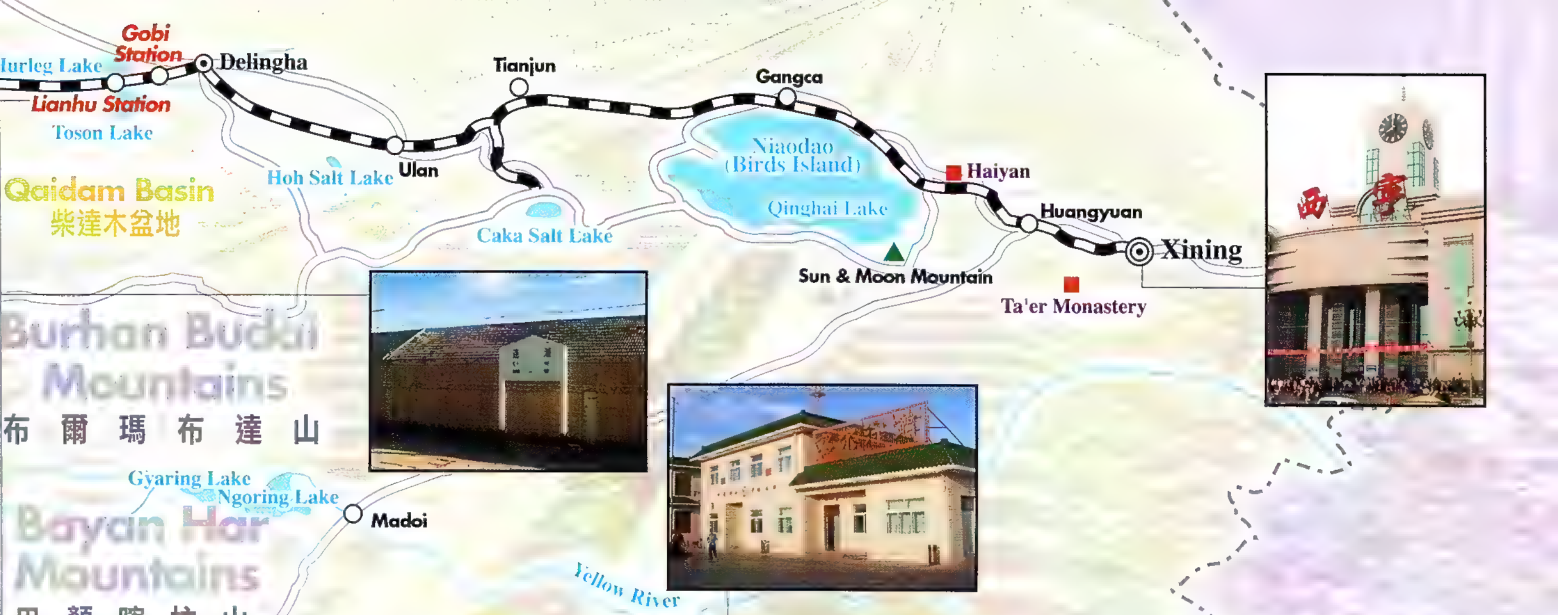

Altitudes
5,000m
4,000m
3,000m
West Lhasa
3,664m
Lhasa
3,641m
Lhasa River
Maxiang
3,924m
Yangbajain
4,306m
Nadola
4,603m
Deqiongguo
4,327m
Chaiqu
Damxung
4,293m
Wumatang
4,502m
Jiuzina
4,614m
Gulu
4,673m
Sangxiongling
4,770m
Tuoru
4,578m
Nagqu
4,513m
Nagqu
Gangxiu
4,646m
Diwuma
4,585m
Co Nag
4,594m
Amdo
4,702m
Tuoju
4,891m
Zajiazangbu
4,886m
Zajiazangbu
Ta
Section with altitudes higher than 4,
11.3
39.8
32.8
36.3
36.2
33.6
39.5
44.6
40.7
18.4
38.2
40.5
28.7
24.7
39.3
39.7

Diagram of the Qinghai-Tibet Railway


Gobi Station
Hurleg Lake
Delingha
Lianhu Station
Toson Lake
Tianjun
Gangca
Qaidam Basin
柴達木盆地
Hoh Salt Lake
Ulan
Niaodao (Birds Island)
Qinghai Lake
Caka Salt Lake
Haiyan
Huangyuan
Xining
Sun & Moon Mountain
Ta'er Monastery
Burhan Budai Mountains
布 爾 瑪 布 達 山
Gyaring Lake
Ngoring Lake
Madoi
Bayan Har Mountains
巴 顏 喀 拉 山
Yellow River

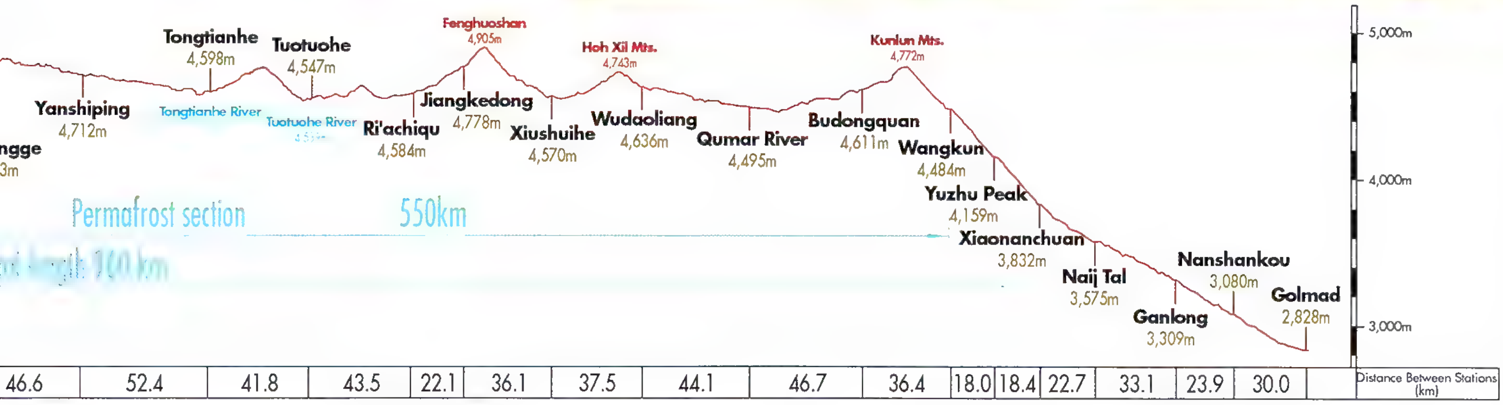
Tongtianhe River
Sichuan
四川
Sêrxü
Yushu
Jinshajiang River
Nangqên
Zaqu River
Ngom River
Dêngqên
Riwoqê
Qamdo
Nujiang River
Lancangjiang River
Baxoi
Bomi

The Qinghai-Tibet Railway marks several world records (by Yang Xin)

The Qinghai-Tibet railway stretches for 1,956 km: of this, 1,142 km is between Golmud and Lhasa, 960 km is built at over 4,000 metres and 550 km runs over permafrost. The railway has created several new world records:

- **Tanggula Mountain Col**: The highest railway line in the world at 5,072 metres above sea level;
- **Tanggula Station**: The highest railway station in the world at 5,068 metres above sea level;
- **Fenghuoshan Mountain Tunnel**: The world's highest frozen earth tunnel at 4,905 metres above sea level and at a length of 1,338 metres;
- **Kunlun Mountain Tunnel**: The world's longest alpine frozen earth tunnel at a length of 1,686 metres;
- **Qingshui River Bridge**: The world's longest railway bridge constructed on frozen earth at a length of 11.7 km;
- **Amdo Track Works Base**: The world's highest railway track work base at 4,704 metres above sea level.

Qingshuihe Bridge (by Yang Xin)



局集团公司承建

...CONSTRUCTION

The decision to build a railway in the severe environment of the Qinghai-Tibet Plateau poses many challenges. Apart from reduced oxygen supply, the harsh climate and the danger of attack by hungry wolves, the builders also have to contend with the unpredictability of permafrost. The complicated situation and extreme difficulties boggle the mind.

One of the most relentless obstacles on the plateau is the wind. In the hinterland crossed by the railway, blizzards are regular visitors, often dropping in without any advanced notice. In the Tanggula, Fenghuoshan and Kunlun mountain ranges in areas 5,000 metres above sea level, gusts can measure 17 metres per second, Level 8 or higher gales rage for more than 100 days each year, and the bitterly cold winds can cause the temperature to drop to -40°C in winter.

Perilous Permafrost

Compared with the extreme weather, frozen soil poses an even greater threat to the railway project. It was failure to tackle this problem that brought construction of the Qinghai-Tibet Railway to a halt at Nanshankou, south of Golmud, in the 1980s.

Plans called for 550 km of the railway to cross the frigid subsoil. Ground that has been frozen for billions of years becomes very hard in winter, but its surface can turn into a dangerous, boggy trap for trains in summer. An engineer told me that in a frozen state, the ground will expand at a continuously low temperature, just like ice, thus causing the roadbed and the rails to hunch up. In summer when the soil thaws, it shrinks, and the roadbed and rails collapse. The changing seasons twist the roadbed and threaten train travel safety.

30 Years on Frozen Land

Since the 1970s, a series of trials have helped experts find ways of dealing with the frozen earth.

1. The Sanchahe Bridge between Naij Tal and Xiaonanchuan with its 54.1 metre-high piers is the highest bridge on the Qinghai-Tibet Railway.

2. Laying track.

Zhang Luxin has worked on the permafrost problem for more than three decades. After graduating from the Tangshan Railway Institute (now Southwest Jiaotong University) in 1970, the young geology major began researching frozen soil for the Railway Survey & Design Institute of China. He worked onsite on permafrost between Fenghuoshan and Tanggula Col. To better study the frozen subsurface of soil, Zhang and his colleagues dug 437 pits on the 4,800 metre-high plateau within a year. They worked hard in that vast and lonely land, helpless against the many difficulties they encountered and regularly losing their way in storms. At first, more than 100 workers participated in the research, but after 12 years, only Zhang and a few others remained, quietly devoted to an undertaking that had been all but forgotten.

Bridges Fused with the Earth

Since work on the Qinghai-Tibet Railway project resumed in 2001, builders have been employing experimental materials and techniques suggested by the tundra experts. The Qingshuihe Bridge, north of the Suonandajie Natural Protection Station, is a successful example of the creative idea of building a bridge instead of a roadbed to extend the railway across those areas that thaw in summer.

The Qingshuihe Bridge is 11.4 km long. Beneath each supporting pier, four piles are driven 20 metres deep into the permafrost. According to the experts, the concrete used to make the piers must be resistant to freezing, cracking, alkali and erosion. When the piers are cast, they are kept at the same temperature as that of the frozen earth to make sure that they freeze into an integral whole with the deep permafrost within the shortest amount of time. As the piers fuse with the "deeply sleeping" permafrost, they become well fortified.

In the two years since the bridge's completion, numerous cargo trucks have travelled over it. Along with the change of seasons, the subsoil has thawed and refrozen, while the areas that thaw vary from year to year, but the bridge remains strong.

Nine such massive bridge projects dot the Qinghai-Tibet Railway, including the Nagqu Bridge, the Touerjiu Bridge at Amdo, the Kouyana Zangbo Bridge, the Tanggula Bridge, the Xueshui River Bridge and the Qumar River Bridge.

Miraculous Refrigerator Bars

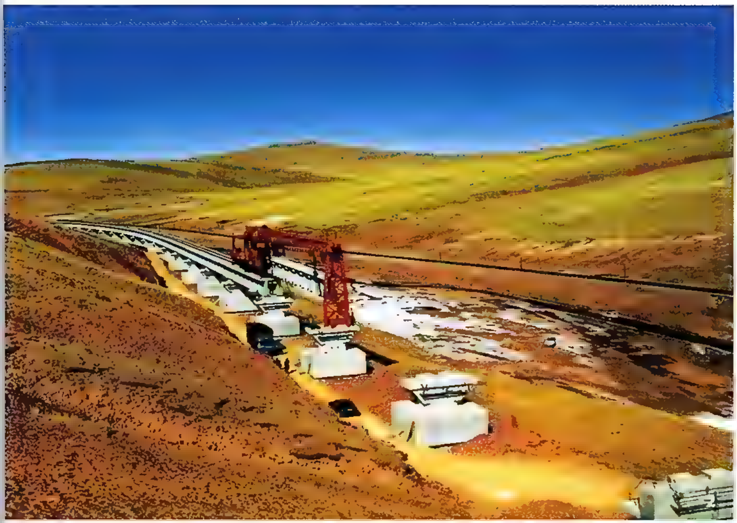
Some sections of the plateau are made up of frozen soil that is relatively stable; its limited ice (water) content means it doesn't thaw or change greatly in summer. Experts have devised several ways of maintaining the stability of this frozen soil under the roadbed in summer. First, a slate and gravel base that lets in fresh air is laid down to dissipate the heat and

1. The Fenghuoshan Tunnel is the most elevated tunnel on the entire railway line and in the world. When workers began blasting the tunnel, they discovered that the debris was almost all crystal ice, with less than 20 percent of actual soil. This is the permafrost layer, a "disastrous geology" as described by tunnel-building experts from home and abroad.

2. Fenghuoshan Col, 5,010 metres above sea level, is known for its year-round gales. Since 1973, several hundred experts have worked here, collecting a vast quantity of data on climate and frozen soil conditions to aid in the construction of the Qinghai-Tibet Railway.

3. The massive Qingshuihe Bridge spans an extremely unstable area of permafrost. Bridge building is the best solution for crossing the frozen soil here as "hot bars" and slab roadbeds proved ineffective.

4. Employees of Bureau No. 11 of China Railway lay tracks on Nyainqêntanglha Mountains (by Jue Guo)



3

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lower the temperature of the roadbed, ensuring that the frozen subsoil will not melt in warmer temperatures. Ventilation pipes are also buried in the roadbed to help keep temperatures low. Finally, "hot bars" can be inserted slantwise along the sides of the roadbed to absorb more heat. Four metres of the six metre-long bars, which are filled with solid ammonia, are driven down into the roadbed. Able to cool a radius of 1.6 metres, the bars are placed two metres apart along the roadbed. Through these measures, the temperature of the entire roadbed is kept under control.

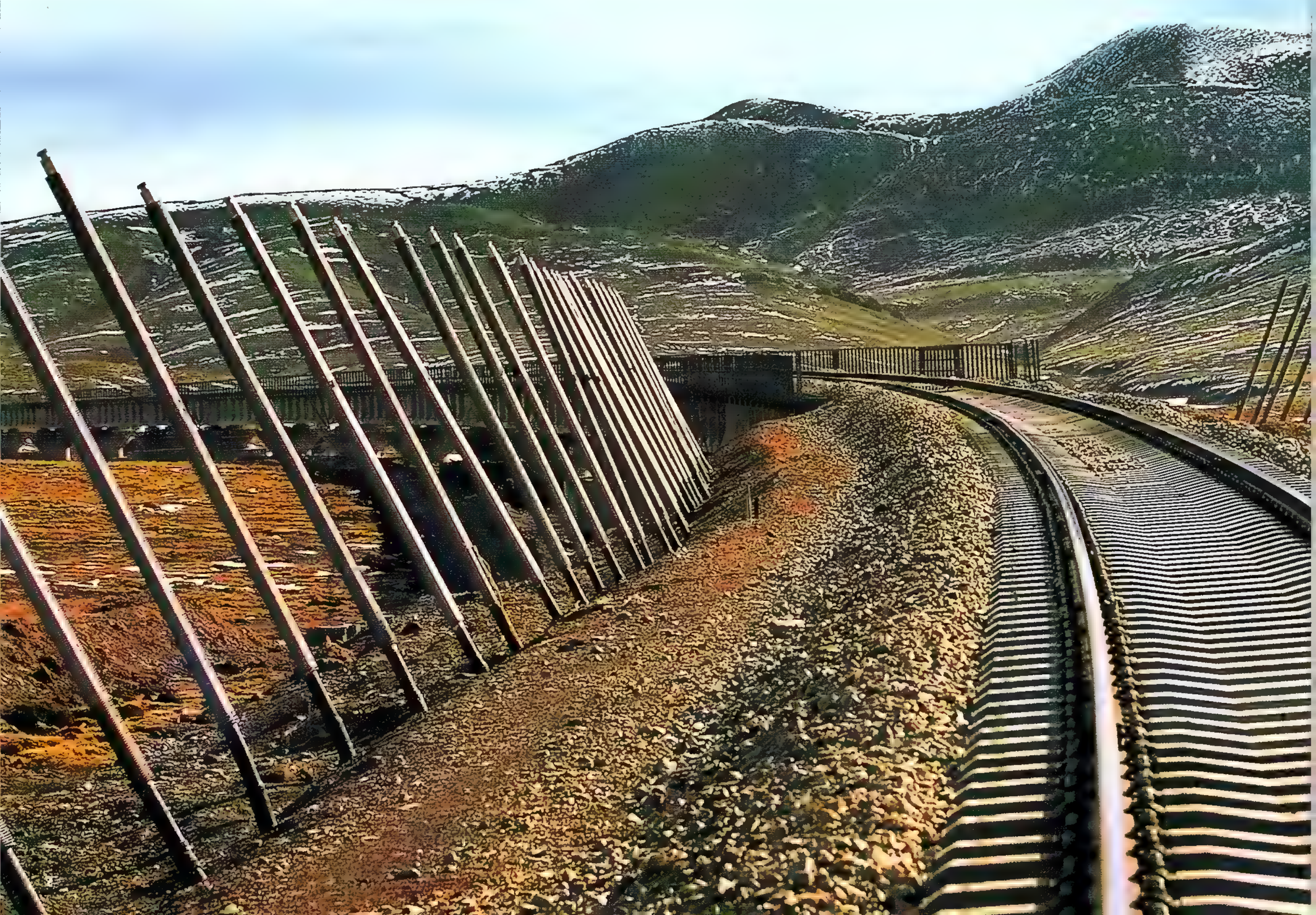
Wan Yinong, an engineer with the First Railway Survey & Design Institute of China under the China Railway Engineering Corp, explained how the bar works. "It's called a 'hot bar', but in effect, it is a one-way refrigerating bar. When the temperature rises in summer, the solid ammonia will transfer all the heat in the subsoil to the top of the bar. In winter, the ammonia will absorb and store the cold, so that when the temperature rises again, the bar will transfer the cold to the underground soil. By absorbing heat and releasing cold, it works like an air conditioner. We are now able to make these miraculous bars, but the price is very high — 4,000 yuan for one bar."

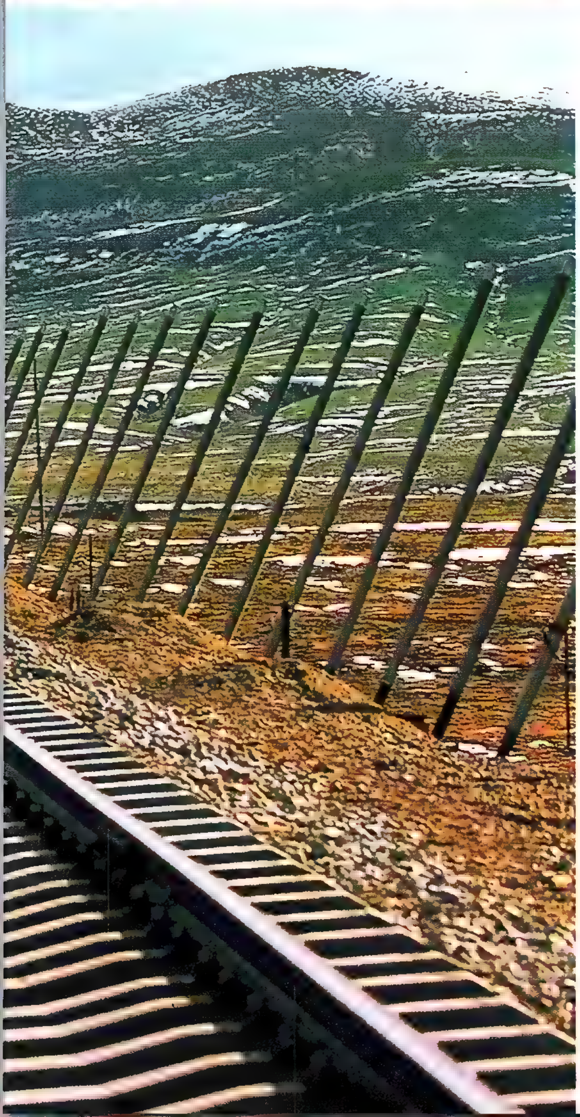
In three years of testing, the roadbed has carried countless cargo trains without incident, proving the practicality and effectiveness of the experts' solutions.

A Numbing Experience

Any construction project requiring concrete cannot start until April and has to end in September. Winter comes to the plateau earlier than most other places. But track laying and bridge construction can continue into November.

Du Fangdong, who works for the Xianyang New Transport Company under the No. 1 Railway Bureau, has spent four years on the railway project. He recalled building a bridge during the harsh winter of





2002. It was December and the temperature at Kunlun Mountain Col had dropped to -40°C. The bitter cold made the steel wires normally used in constructing the bridge hard to bend, so they had to fashion bunches of thinner wire instead. Lubricant and grease froze on their machinery. The workers wore leather clothes, boots and gloves, cotton-stuffed caps and large gauze masks to protect their skin from the freezing air. When they exhaled, their eyebrows and the edges of their caps and masks frosted over. Since everyone was dressed the same, they could not tell each other apart and had to shout to be heard. "It was really terrible," Du said. "My face was so numb with the cold that I couldn't smile or cry."

Lurking Wolves

According to Wang Xiaobin, one of the more unsettling facts about the plateau is the presence of wolves. A worker on night duty at the well drilling site heard a strange sound outside his tent late one night. When he peered outside, he saw a pack of wolves sitting nearby. The worker remained calm. Realizing that a canvas tent was no deterrent to a wolf attack, he crept out and climbed onto the drill derrick. The wolves clustered round below him, howling and jumping as they couldn't climb up. The experienced worker had not forgotten his padded coat as he knew that the temperature could drop to zero even on a summer night. The wolves didn't leave until dawn.

Translated by Julia Han

1. A "hot bar", a sealed metal tube filled with solid ammonia, is driven deep into the ground along the roadbed. It works like an air-conditioner, absorbing heat and releasing cold to keep the ground temperature steady. (by Wan Yinong)

2. The "hot bars" are inserted into the roadbed every two metres in Xidatan to prevent the frozen subsoil from melting in summer. (by Jue Guo)

3. Working on the railway line under snow-capped peaks. (by Jue Guo)

战风沙
斗严寒
翻江绘彩虹

2

LABOUR

The first phase of construction on the Qinghai-Tibet Highway was completed at the cost of several hundred lives over 20 years of arduous work. Happily, the project's second phase has seen a significant reduction in the mistakes and problems that led to previous casualties thanks to improved safety measures.

Most of the second phase of construction has taken place on the vast areas of land 4,000 metres above sea level, and on sections of the Tanggula and Fenghuoshan mountain ranges that rise above 5,000 metres. Such harsh geographic conditions don't allow for any blindly optimistic practices or irrational acts. Life becomes more precious here.

Ascetics on the Tanggula

In the 1990s, the Qinghai-Tibet Plateau gained newfound popularity in China thanks to a song recorded by pop star Li Na. Her single "The Tibetan Plateau" is considered the best song ever written about Tibet. Her voice transports listeners to a land of snow-capped peaks, green grasslands and soft white clouds against a clear blue sky. However, when the railway workers first reached the Tanggula, all such beautiful perceptions of the sacred place vanished. Instead they were confronted by vast desolation with scarcely an inhabitant. The oxygen in the air was half that on the plain, so thin that even a slow walk would leave them gasping for breath.

Quick Weight Loss Plan

The workers struggled to adjust to plateau life until late spring when supplies of oxygen and medicine arrived. They were to re-measure the route of the railway on the icy, barren Tanggula. Though it was May, the temperature on Happy Ridge, nearly 5,000 metres above sea level, was still lower than any winter they had ever known. Their hands and feet were continually numb with cold, their faces drained of colour. When blizzards bore down on them, they could hardly stand, much less walk, and had to stay in their tents to try to keep warm.

Despite the rains and snows, in August the temperature finally rose to 15°C on sunny days. But with the warmth came the punishing ultraviolet rays of the sun. All of the 100-odd workers suffered burns,

1. Celebrating the completion of laying the tracks for the Fenghuoshan Tunnel.

2. A wedding ceremony at the worksite in heavy snow. (by Liu Shunliang)

3. The camp train-an old, refitted 15-carriage passenger train. Four workers shared one sleeper carriage.

their lips, noses, cheeks and ears all peeling within days. Those with more tender skin developed blisters and cankers, as if being scalded by boiling oil.

It's common to lose weight on the plateau because the lack of oxygen and the low air pressure means the body consumes more energy than usual. Insomnia and reduced appetite caused by exposure to high altitudes can result in weight loss of 2.5~5 kg in less than six months. Some of the workers dropped from 80 kg to less than 60 kg. Those nicknamed "Fatty" were suddenly slim and had to cut down their loose belts.

For anyone looking to lose several kilos, a visit to the plateau might prove tempting.

Eating is a Revolution on the Plateau

"It is a revolution to eat on the plateau." So goes a popular phrase among the Qinghai-Tibet Railway workers.

Zhang Changlin, a cook with the Department of Construction & Technology under the China Railway First Group Co, Ltd, understands this all too well. As another saying goes, "One can't make bricks without straw." Zhang didn't realize how difficult cooking could be until he came to the plateau. When he first arrived at Tongtianhe, he couldn't sleep for three nights, plagued by headaches, breathing difficulties and nausea.

Every morning, despite his suffering, he had to get up early to prepare breakfast. He nearly suffocated in the small kitchen, as the cooking fire ate up the already insufficient oxygen. Zhang had to stop and walk outside several times to breathe in the fresh air. The lack of oxygen also kept the stove fire small. Because of the low air pressure, pressure cookers had to be used to cook noodles or steam rice and bread. The first time he tried using one to prepare noodles, he ended up with a pot full of porridge. After several failures, he finally got the knack of cooking at 4,500 metres above sea level. His rice is now renowned.

As it turns out, eating is even more difficult than cooking at high altitudes. People lose their appetites at such a height no matter how delicious the food. But with all the energy they used and the sleep they needed, if the workers didn't eat enough, their bodies would soon break down. Their superiors issued an order: anyone who didn't eat would be fired. It worked and everyone shovelled the food in like force-fed ducks.

Bundling up the Train

Needing to be mobile, the track-laying, bridge-building team lived on a train, which Du Fangdong and the other workers dubbed the "camp train". The train had 15 carriages that included a meeting room, a canteen, a clinic and a power room. Four workers shared one sleeper carriage.

"The first winter, we used the boiler on the train to keep warm, but the heating pipes cracked because of the extreme cold. So we had to use an electric furnace. But the indoor temperature only reached -5 or -6°C. We slept on two thick cotton mattresses under two quilts and all our leather clothes, but we still struggled to fall asleep because of the freezing cold. The following year, we refitted the camp train to use

1. The China Railway First Group Co, Ltd takes rat-control seriously, as Qinghai has been the source of plagues. Before trains came to the region, disease spread slowly, usually through marmots. There is concern that train travel could expand the affected areas.

2. When they first arrived, the workers found they had little appetite. For most people, altitude sickness begins to lessen after three or four days, but others need a few weeks or even a month to adjust. Workers who could not adapt were sent back. (by Liu Shunliang)

3. Oxygen cylinders are provided at all railway building sites, and every worker must breathe oxygen for at least two hours every day. Modern medical facilities are available at all worksites.

one carriage as the stokehold. We wrapped all the pipes and draped the train in thick canvas, like a coat. The temperature in the compartments finally rose to 20°C until we felt hot in a sweater. We had a good, warm sleep after that," Du reminisced.

Not One Less

The biggest threat to the workers is the oxygen deficit caused by the low air pressure. When the Qinghai-Tibet Highway was built in the early 1950s, conditions were primitive and few precautions were taken to protect lives. At that time in China, besides backward science and technology practices, it was generally accepted that truly great achievements could be only be reached at the expense of human life. Under these circumstances, highly competitive labour contests were held frequently on the building sites. Many young workers fell, never to rise again. Simple respiratory problems associated with colds and fevers could be fatal, and cardiovascular diseases were no match for the basic-at-best medical facilities on the plateau.

The radical slogans "Fear Neither Hardship nor Death" and "Be Resolved and Fear No Sacrifice" are rarely heard these days. When construction of the railway began, senior officials with the China Railway First Group Co., Ltd. made it clear that all of the workers participating in the project must come back safely. By early March 2001, before the workers set out, the construction bureau had already built a hospital at Tuotuo River some 4,600 metres above sea level. By May, an oxygen-generating station and a special air pressure cabin had also been built. When the workers arrived, the company immediately explained the detailed medical precautions they must adhere to: 1) everyone would inhale oxygen for at least two hours a day; 2) those working at 4,500 metres above sea level in the Tuotuohe and Tongtianhe areas were forbidden to drink alcohol and were advised against smoking; 3) the hospital had permission to requisition any vehicle to save critically ill patients; 4) medical workers were assigned to inspect each and every area of operation, and big operation areas must be equipped with clinics; and, 5) medicines to combat oxygen deficits, sunblock, sunglasses and winter gear must be distributed to every worker. The hospital at the building site also bought a 700,000-yuan ambulance that could serve as an operating room on wheels.

It's said that when the 2,000 km-long Sichuan-Tibet Highway was built in the early 1950s, more than 1,000 workers perished: that's an average of one every two kilometres. The death toll was even heavier when the Qinghai-Tibet Highway was constructed, claiming one worker for every kilometre of the Fenghuoshan section. What a high cost the Chinese paid for these projects. And when the tracks of the Xining-Golmud section of the Qinghai-Tibet Railway were laid in the 1960s and 70s, 201 military railway engineers died.

Thankfully, times and attitudes have changed. From the loss of thousands of lives to the principle of "not one less", China has made remarkable progress.

Translated by Julia Han

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ECOLOGY

Photos & Article • Yang Xin

The opening of the Qinghai-Tibet Railway is big news in China, prompting trainloads of people to head for Lhasa. But what of the environmental problems increased access might bring to the area? In the largest ever investment of its kind in China, more than two billion yuan has been spent on environmental protection efforts along the railway line, making it the country's first environmentally friendly railway. But is nature really protected?

After five years of hard work by the railway builders, the 1,142 km-long section of the Qinghai-Tibet Railway Line from Golmud to Lhasa is now open to normal traffic, completing the railway line. The railway has promoted highway and other infrastructure construction along the line; a railway station has been set up at the foot of the Kunlun Mountains, and nearby counties such as Qumarleb will build highways to the station. These projects have been accelerated to spur the local economy. It is said that to meet the needs of an increasing number of tourists, the local government plans to build a highway to the glacier source of the Yangtze River.

Highway Construction Follows the Railway

Lacking the strong financial support behind the railway and with less emphasis on environmental protection, highway construction is tremendously hazardous to the area's vegetation. Excessive

1. Local vegetation surrounding the source of the Yangtze River has remained undisturbed for thousands of years, but environmental problems loom with the opening of the Qinghai-Tibet Highway and Railway.

2. The railway passes through sand dunes by the Tuotuo River.

1. The railway has set aside 33 passageways, most of them under bridges, for Tibetan antelopes.

2. Tibetan antelopes are often struck by cars while trying to cross the Qinghai-Tibetan Highway during migration.

3. Greenriver volunteers stop vehicles on the highway to keep migrating antelopes safe.

4. Wind and sand breaks along the railway.

5. With cars blocked by volunteers, Tibetan antelopes can cross the highway.

highway construction continually fragments the grasslands and the Qinghai-Tibet Plateau and shrinks the habitats of wild animals.

Over 400 km of the Golmud-Lhasa section of the railway line runs through the source of the Yangtze River and Hoh Xil. This is the least populated area in the hinterland of the Qinghai-Tibet Plateau, with an average elevation of over 4,500 metres and the plateau's lowest precipitation rate of less than 400 mm a year. With annual average temperatures below 0°C, vegetation here is comparatively sparse, so once damaged, the fragile eco-environment can scarcely recover.

The construction of the railway line has been unprecedented in terms of environmental protection efforts. A series of measures were taken: to fix positions for digging and quarrying, dirt backfilling, and routes for engineering vehicles; to limit the number of worksites to reduce damage to the pasture; and, to halt construction to give way to migrating Tibetan antelopes. The railway builders did whatever they could to ensure ecological protection, including adopting the proposals of Greenriver, a Chinese non-governmental organization (NGO) dedicated to nature and ecological conservation. But even with all these measures, any large infrastructure project will impact the environment, and the Qinghai-Tibet Railway is no exception.

Why Migration Is Good

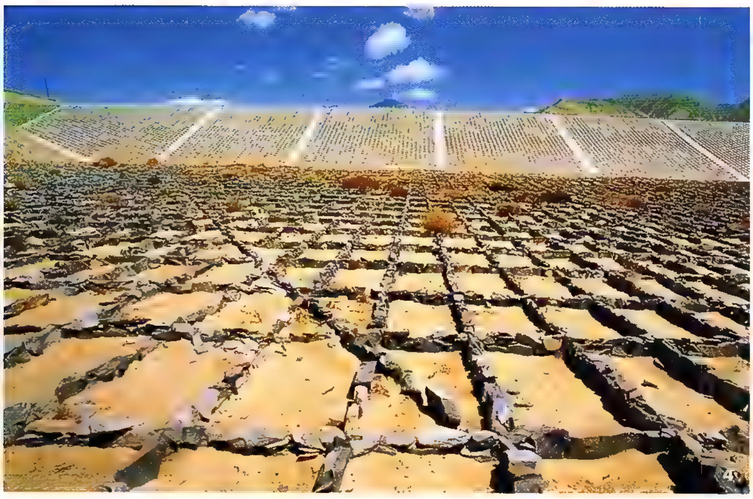
Animal migration is biologically important because it can: (1) Prevent species degradation due to inbreeding; (2) Help species adapt to areas with unfavourable seasonal climates; (3) Keep a portion of the species temporarily outside their normal habit; (4) Expand the species' habitat; and, (5) Keep species numbers stable.

Tibetan Antelope Migration

The Qinghai-Tibet Railway Line cuts across the Nature Reserves of the Hoh Xil and the Sources of the Three Rivers. This is the most concentrated area of China's large wildlife, including wild yaks, Tibetan gazelles and antelopes, all of which come under category-A national-level protection. The Tibetan antelopes are the most well-known.

Unique to the Qinghai-Tibet Plateau, the Tibetan antelope has lived at altitudes of 4,000 metres and higher for thousands of years. Every June tens of thousands of pregnant females migrate to the mysterious uninhabited area of Xinjiang, Tibet and Qinghai in the hinterland of the plateau, later returning to their habitat with their calves. Such huge contingents are followed by wolves, foxes and hawks. Some calves inevitably become feasts for the predators - a fine example of the natural food chain. It is only due to their large numbers that the species has survived to this day.

The completion of the Qinghai-Tibet Highway in the 1950s divided the habitats of Tibetan antelopes. Those living southeast of the highway had to cross it twice to complete the birthing process. Investigation shows that after 50 years the highway is still the largest obstacle to the migration of the antelopes. In the early years fewer and slower vehicles travelled the highway, so the antelopes could still run as they liked on the plateau. Even before the construction of the Qinghai-Tibet Railway, Tibetan antelopes could still cross the highway at the 100-km section investigated by Greenriver. In 2002 when the railway and

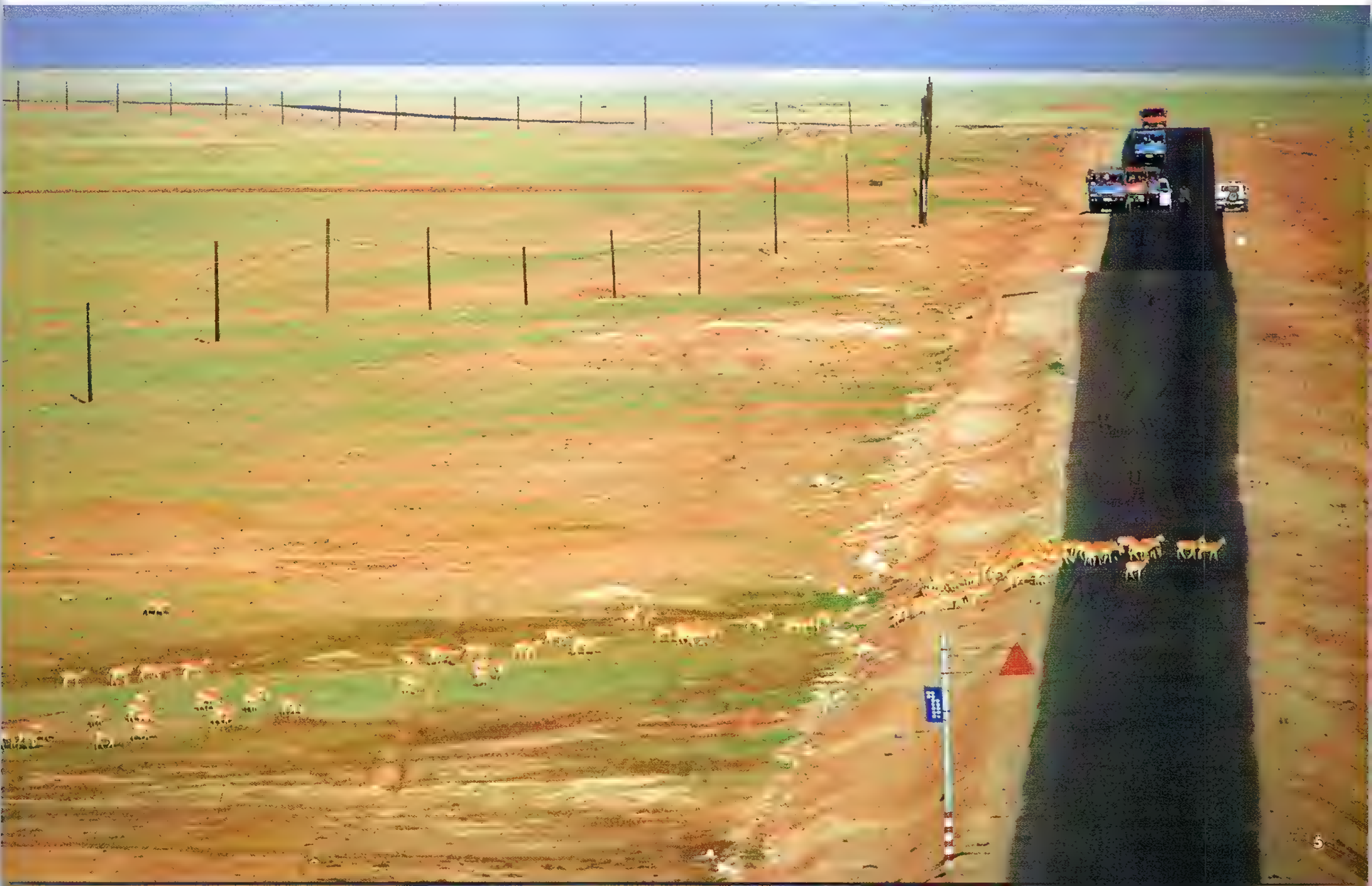


highway were under simultaneous construction and repair, the antelopes were limited to an area less than 10 km south of the Qumar River. Nearly 90 percent of them were jammed together in a narrow passage no more than one kilometre wide. That year over 700 antelopes failed to complete their migration and had to give birth on the spot. In 2003 that number increased to 1,500. The next year, over 2,000 antelopes completed their migration with the help of Greenriver volunteers and staff of the Hoh Xil Nature Reserve Administration. Still, hundreds of antelopes gave up and delivered midway through the journey.

Despite the fact that 33 migration routes were specially planned for the antelopes during railway construction, so far no estimate has been made as to how much the railway will impact them.

Desertification through Excessive Grazing

The image of the Qinghai-Tibet Plateau — blue sky, white clouds, snow-capped mountains and prairies — should include another feature: sand dunes. Sand dunes hundreds of metres long have formed in Xidatan. A variety of structures aimed at blocking sand blown by the wind have been erected along the railway line, including around Tuotuohe Railway Station. The Tuotuohe River Bridge — the first



bridge across the Yangtze River — is next to the station.

According to scientific data collected years ago, the prairies of the Qinghai-Tibet Plateau are deteriorating at an annual rate of two percent, making desertification a real threat.

The small railway town of Wudaoliang sits about 4,600 metres above sea level. The rail route crosses the nearby pasture of Zhirangou just 3.3 km away and the lush surrounding mountains provided stones and dirt for the railway's construction. At completion of construction, the quarry and digging areas were roughly bulldozed level, but it will take a long time to for the vegetation to recover.

Local herdsmen acknowledge that the railway makes it much easier for them to travel. But herdsmen travel very little, and the railway has split their pasture in two, making rotational grazing difficult. There are few passageways for cattle along the railway line, and the government has informed the herders that sheep and cattle should not walk across the railway. If the animals are hit by a train, the herders are held responsible. So the sheep and cattle graze mostly on one side of the railway. The lack of rotational grazing may result in the excessive use of some parts of the pasture, which will lead to pasture degradation or desertification.

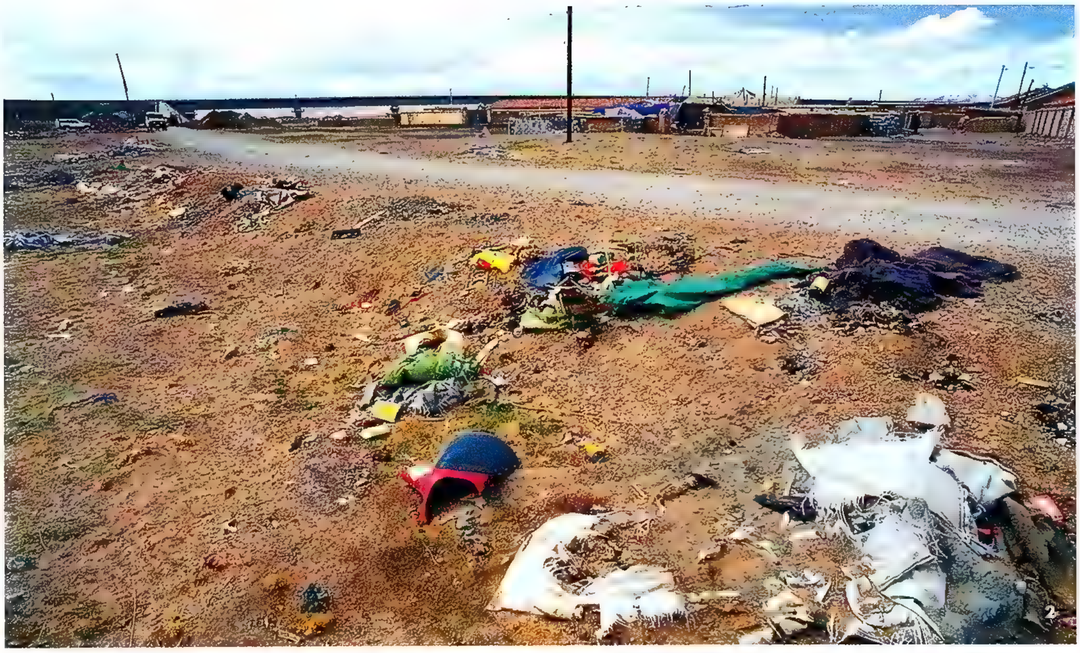
Impact of Modern Consumerism

Herdsmen are nomadic by nature and rely on the grasslands for their living. Along with the highway construction and the arrival of more outsiders, the stores and restaurants along the Qinghai-Tibet Highway have been almost monopolized by new settlers. The lifestyles and consumption practices of these newcomers are becoming popular on the grassland. Mass-produced food, plastic everyday goods, motorbikes and even cars have become daily necessities for the locals, although they are all purchased with sheep and cattle. Excessive demand for these animals has added to the burden on the grassland, and so herders are constantly expanding their pastures. At the source area of the Yangtze River their grazing ground has ascended to a height of 5,500 metres — the maximum height for plant growth and the last pastureland available to the herdsmen. Sheep and cattle can even be seen grazing in the centre of the Hoh Xil Nature Reserve.

Increasing Spread of Rubbish

The opening of the railway will introduce even more outside culture, bringing with it enticingly cheap, industrially produced goods and concepts of modern consumerism.

Tuotuoheyuan, one of the largest towns along the Qinghai-Tibet Highway, is home to the first bridge on the Yangtze River, the first school, military depot and gas station, and, now, the first garbage dump along the Yangtze. Almost every afternoon when the wind picks up, dust rises and plastic bags fly about the town. There is no governmental department collecting garbage and keeping the environment clean. Trash is



thrown anywhere and left for nature's disposal, so the whole town is practically surrounded by garbage, making Tuotuoheyuan, and virtually all the other towns along the Qinghai-Tibet Highway, one long dumping ground.

Medical waste, including used syringes and transfusion bottles from Tuotuoheyuan's hospitals and private clinics, amounts to some 10 tons a year! Except for hotels, no residential homes or other buildings have private toilets. With just a few basic public toilets available, most of the locals and tourists have to discreetly relieve themselves somewhere along the highway. It would be disastrous if the millions of livestock on the plateau were stricken by a virus. Garbage disposal has become a critical problem along the Qinghai-Tibet Railway line.

Carrying Garbage Back to Golmud

With guaranteed financial support, train carriages and railway stations can be kept very clean, even spotless. However, a whole series of environmental problems brought by disembarking train travellers, the foreign materials they carry to the plateau and the economic activities afforded by cheap railway transport will have to be addressed by local authorities. Is the underdeveloped local economy able to bear the burden?

Greenriver has advised local government to add special compressed trash carriages to the trains to carry Tuotuoheyuan's daily garbage to the refuse treatment plant in Golmud. Railway freight transport records show that more goods are transported into Tibet than vice-versa, so available railway freight capacity from Lhasa to Golmud is not a problem. Without increasing transportation costs, the garbage from Mount Tanggula Township can be removed on the compressed carriages. This solution makes full use of the railway's resources and surplus freight capacity, while solving the garbage treatment problem along the railway line.

Translated by Yu Ling

Lonely Fighter - Greenriver

Greenriver has been the lone environmental campaigner in the headwater area of the Yangtze River and Hoh Xil. In the five years of railway construction in particular, the NGO completed one project after another funded solely by book sales. Its projects and proposals have influenced the policies of the government and construction companies regarding environmental protection.

In June 2002 during the Tibetan antelopes' migratory birthing season, the railway construction team stopped work several times to make way for the animals' passage, following Greenriver's advice on specific migration routes, locations and times.

In January 2003 after spending two years covering some 30,000 km and making 139 investigations, Greenriver volunteers completed the 20,000-word *Suonandajie Natural Protection Station's Investigation and Research Report on Wildlife*. So far this is the only complete data report on Tibetan antelope in the area.

Yang Xin, the author of this article, is the President of Greenriver.

Website: www.green-river.org/02

1. The Qinghai-Tibet Railway passes through Xidatan — a sandstorm-stricken area with little vegetation coverage.

2. Garbage strewn across the road near the Tuotuohe Bridge.

3. The Suonandajie Natural Protection Station for environmental protection and the Qinghai-Tibet Highway and Railway.

Tourist Stops Along the Rails

Photos • Cheng Weidong, Stone
Article • Cheng Weidong

The Qinghai-Tibet Railway is a magical route carrying travellers to the holy city of Lhasa. Yet, every passenger can appreciate the many other famous attractions along the way: Qaidam Basin, Qarhan Salt Lake, the Kunlun Mountains, the no man's land of Hoh Xil, the Tuotuo River (the uppermost source of the Yangtze), the snow-capped peaks of the Tanggula Mountains and Qiangtang Grassland.

The Qinghai-Tibet Railway climbs over permanently snow-clad mountains. (by Du Fangdong)

1. Wang Luobin, the miserable yet romantic King of Folk Songs in the West, has been honoured with a large bust at the centre of a spacious square. (by Shi Dong)

2. At the A-bomb base museum in Haixi Town visitors can learn about the top-secret experiments that went on here 40 years ago. (by Shi Dong)

3. The walled up nuclear experiment base was once completely cut-off from public entry. This specially made steel structure housed shockwave energy testing facilities. (by Cheng Weidong)

4. Jin Yan Tan (Golden & Silvery Beach) Grassland's sea of golden blossoms may have inspired some of Wang Luobin's many famous folk songs. (by Shi Dong)

王洛宾
1913.12—1996.3
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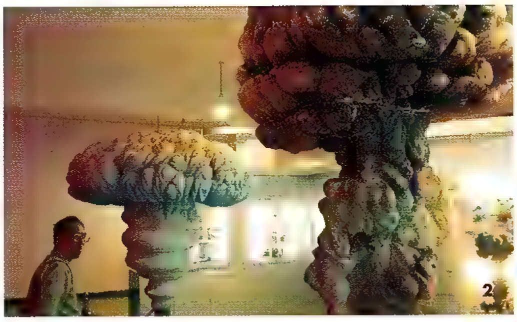
Xining, where the railway begins, is the capital of Qinghai Province and the headquarters of the Qinghai-Tibet Railway Group. Huangzhong County, where the provincial capital is located, is also home to Ta'er Monastery, the largest Yellow Sect monastery in Qinghai. Nearby Huangnan Tibetan Autonomous Prefecture is the cradle of Regong art, one of the respected schools of Tibetan Buddhist art.

A-Bombs and Folk Songs

Leaving Xining, the train heads west along the Huangshui River. At the Huangyuan County seat, the railway parts ways with the ancient Tang-Bo Road, a trade route said to have run from Tang to Tibet, or Bod in Tibetan, during the Tang Dynasty (618—907). As the train moves northwest to the Qinghai-Tibet Plateau, the mountain vegetation begins to thin out. When we reach Haiyan, the only thing growing is grass. The administrative seat of Haibei Tibetan Autonomous Prefecture, Haiyan has a large railway station. The area was once a base for experimental nuclear weapons development. Such work has long since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stopped here, the facilities abandoned deep in the mountains. An exhibition hall in Xihai Town tracks how the country started from scratch to produce its own A-bombs.

Former base employees had to follow extremely strict rules to ensure confidentiality. They had no contact with the outside world, could not move freely between the separate work zones, except for work-related reasons, and were not allowed to discuss their jobs with their families. This mysterious, previously off-limits place is now like any other small town. But in homage to its special past, one area has remained untouched for "Red Tourism", a term for nostalgic tours to places that played a part in China's more recent history. Wide streets lined with graceful trees and whitewashed buildings now greet visitors.

Oddly enough, the famous lyricist and folk song composer of West China Wang Luobin (1913—1996) actually lived near this weapons base. He penned some of his masterpieces on Jin Yan Tan (Golden & Silvery Beach) Grassland north of Xihai Town. At a memorial square at the edge of the town, a large bust of Wang pays tribute to his musical legacy.

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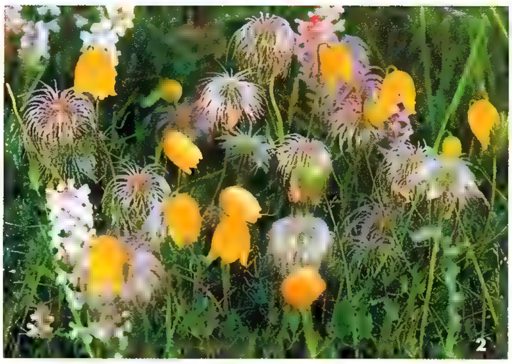

Tianjun Mountain

Continuing west from Haiyan, the train leaves the Riyue (Sun and Moon) Mountain Range before reaching Qinghai Lake, the largest inland saltwater lake in China. In the not-so-distant past, the Chinese Navy conducted torpedo and submarine trials in the lake. It was only opened to tourism in the late 1980s. In July, fields of bright rape flowers stretch for miles around. At Ga Hai, the train rumbles on along the lake's northern rim to Qiequangou (Cutting Spring Gully), where it continues along the waterfront. On the day that local Tibetans perform their rituals and present sacrifices to the "blue sea", crowds of highlanders and strings of colourful, fluttering prayer flags can be seen at the lakeside. From here, Bird Island is a mere 25 km away. The island is a virtual paradise for birds, with thousands flocking to its shores.

Leaving Qinghai Lake, the train continues west along the Buha River and onto Tianjun Mountain for about 60 km. Tianjun, with its 4,500 metre-high peak, is the first high-altitude mountain along the route, while the Guanjiao Tunnel that penetrates it is 3,800 metres above sea level. Passengers with little or no highland travel experience may fall ill with mountain sickness when they reach the tunnel. Headache, a tight feeling in the chest, shortness of breath and other symptoms may continue until the train reaches the rim of Qaidam Basin some 200 km further on.

1. Local Haibei Tibetans perform rituals at Qinghai Lake. The piles of stacked stones, called lab tse in Tibetan, are similar to the ao bao (sacred stones) in Mongolia. This is an important Tibetan religious site. (by Shi Dong)

2. Incredibly, trees and grass flourish at the rim of the otherwise barren and desolate Qaidam Basin. Summer brings wildflowers. (by Shi Dong)

3. Qinghai Lake is a paradise for birds. (by Lu Xiangyou)

Amazing Lakes

The train arrives at Chahannuo Station at the foot of Tianjun Mountain. An extension of the railway branches out from here to Caka Salt Lake 30 km to the south. This is the largest sodium production area in China. A special tank-like vehicle takes visitors out to the middle of the lake. The snow-white salt flats spreading out in all directions bring to mind the North Pole, but the "ice and snow" are edible rock salt crystals.

Travelling west from Chahannuo, the train passes Wulan County and arrives at Hoh Town, named after Hoh Salt Lake. Much smaller than the Caka, the Hoh is only about 1/50 the size of the former. Still further west is Gahai Station near Gahai Lake to the south. Due to the inadequate sodium concentration in this lake, it does not produce salt, but highly prized "brine worms" thrive in the water. Sun-dried worms are valued more highly than gold!

After another 20 km or so, the train reaches Delingha, the administrative seat of the Haixi Mongolian-Tibetan Autonomous Prefecture. This pleasant city nestles against a backdrop of mountains, with a river and clean, wide streets running through it. South of Delingha is the Qaidam wasteland. Heading west, the train passes along the Gobi Desert to arrive at Lianhu (Twin Lakes) Station. The twin lakes are a pair of large lakes on the south and north sides of the town. Toson Lake, on the south side, is a saltwater lake, while Hurleg is a smaller, freshwater lake sprouting luxuriant reeds. The pristine Hurleg is amply stocked with fish. A few years ago hairy crabs from Yangcheng Lake in Jiangsu Province were introduced to the lake. Raised in the clear lake water, the crabs have especially long legs. Though not as meaty, the taste is quite fresh and delicious. Best of all, it's completely pollutant-free.

1. Caka Salt Lake is the largest lake in China producing edible salt. The lake has been developed from ancient times; the rock salt was said to have been used by the Qing (1616—1911) emperors and empresses to clean their teeth. (by Shi Dong)

2. Ga Hai Lake produces the highly prized brine worm. (by Shi Dong)

3. Delingha, capital of Haixi Mongolian Autonomous Prefecture, looks out on the Qaidam wasteland. (by Chen Shenggui)

4. A small fleet of fishing boats in Hurleg Lake. (by Chen Shenggui)

5. Hurleg Lake is known for its bountiful freshwater fish. The hairy crab introduced from Jiangsu Province is fresh and tasty due to the uncontaminated lake water. (by Shi Dong)

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Qaidam Basin

Leaving the twin lakes, the train approaches the heartland of the Qaidam Basin. The Qaidam ("salt marsh" in Mongolian) spreads over 200,000 sq km and is surrounded by the Kunlun, Altun and Qilian mountains. It slopes gradually from the northwest down to the southwest. At its lowest point, an altitude of 2,600 metres above sea level, many lakes and marshes have been formed by pools of melted snow water.

Not a single trace of human life is evident under the scorching sun bearing down on the Qaidam wasteland. Occasionally bunches of shrubbery spring from the sand dunes and rocky outcroppings. Even so, the Qaidam is truly amazing to behold.

On the Salt Bridge

From the Twin Lakes Station onward, we will pass Yinmaxia (Drinking Horse Gorge) Station in 20 km, Xitieshan (Tin & Iron Mountain) Station in another 30 km and Qarhan Station in 64 km. Perhaps only on the Qinghai-Tibet Railway do passengers experience such long intervals between stations.

As we approach Qarhan, "frosty" bare earth is exposed on either side of the railway, looking as if it had been ploughed up. Soon after, a white crystal expanse appears.

As the train passes Qarhan Station, some buildings and tall white mounds come into view. Qarhan is famous for sylvite, a white mineral made up of potassium chloride harvested from Dabsan Lake. We are told something quite incredible-this 30-km

section of the railway, as well as the highway here, are built on the hard crust of salt, beneath which is the salt lake! We all suddenly feel a bit uneasy.

The lake's surface is not visible from the train. If we were to get off at this station and walk northwest for about eight kilometres, past the potassium fertilizer factory, we would reach the lake, which is divided into huge square blocks. The lake water is brine with a high concentration of sylvite. The brine is pumped through thick pipes to the drying fields where it crystallizes into a greyish sylvite. From the drying fields it is transferred by truck to the storage sites, which account for the mounds of sylvite piled up around the train station. The potassium fertilizer factory has an exhibition hall where tourists can see the different sylvite and sodium crystals.

Golmud — Salt Lake City

After more than 10 hours of train travel, we reach Golmud (meaning "a place where rivers converge" in Mongolian). The place was likely named by the Mongolian cavalry that stormed Tibet 700 years ago. More than 20 rivers meet here, including the Golmud River, which originates from Kunlun Mountain. Located at the lowest point of the Qaidam Basin, Golmud is surrounded by sweeping luxuriant grassland. In 1953 while constructing the Qinghai-Tibet Highway, the Chinese army set up a base camp at Golmud, just as the Mongolian troops had done centuries before them. The Golmud Military Depot was established the following year. The two-storey General's House was a lone brick-and-mortar structure on the brambly outback of China back then, but the city grew from this settlement. By 1957, the population had reached 100,000, of which 60, 000 were soldiers. The name "Soldier City" would not have been an exaggeration. But from 1958, as Qarhan's sylvite industry expanded, Golmud was dubbed "Salt Lake City". Eventually, what started as a military campsite with tents and camels became the third largest city on the Qinghai-Tibet Plateau, after Xining and Lhasa. After a long pause, work on the Golmud-Lhasa phase of the Qinghai-Tibet Railway was resumed five years ago and Golmud remained the base camp for this section of the railway project.

Golmud is now a bustling city. Travellers from east China and Tibet proper, along with Western tourists following this route, must all transit here before entering Tibet.

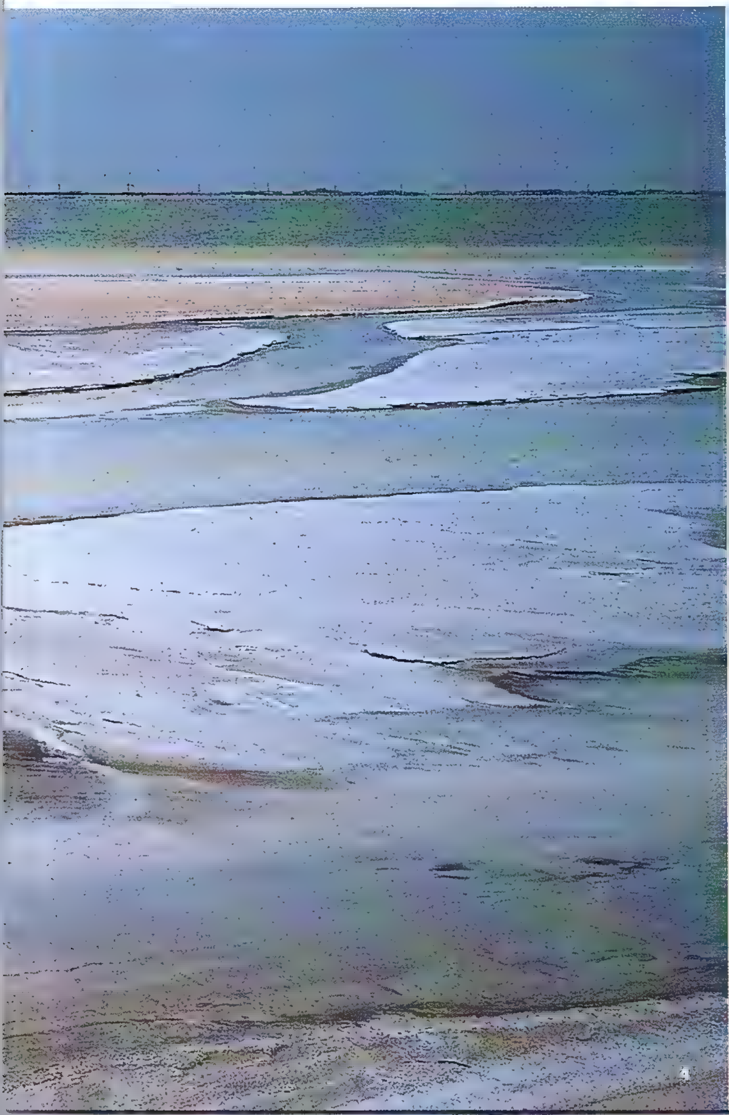
1. The highway and the railway run along the "thousand-foot salt bridge". (by Shi Dong)

2 & 3. Different forms of sylvite and sodium crystal clusters. (by Ma Shiji, Shi Dong)

4. The brine lakes of Qarhan's sylvite drying fields. (by Shi Dong)

5. Fifty years ago, Golmud was a reed-filled swamp plagued by mosquitoes. Now it is a vibrant modern city. (by Shi Dong)

6. The General's House, headquarters of the Supreme Commander of the Qinghai-Tibet Highway project in the 1950s, was the most luxurious building in Golmud at that time. (by Shi Dong)



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1. Kunlun Spring at Naij Tal gurgles throughout the year; the water quality is supreme. (by Cheng Weidong)

2. Awesome Kunlun Mountains, King of All Mountains. (by Shi Dong)

3. In November 2001, an earthquake measuring 8.1 on the Richter scale shook the mountains, causing a monument at Kunlun Pass to break. (by Shi Weidong)

4. This stone stele remained intact after the quake. (by Shi Dong)

Kunlun — King of All Mountains

Some 30 km south of Golmud, the train stops at Nanshankou Station. Work on the first phase of the Qinghai-Tibet Railway had to be stopped here some decades ago. A dark "cave" can be seen on the cliff by the roadside. This was the railway tunnel, deserted 20 years ago after workers managed to penetrate some 30 metres into the mountainside.

Easier passage was built in the form of a bridge over the Golmud River instead. The Golmud River forms the lower reaches of the Kunlun River. Melted snow water tumbles down a 30-metre gorge off the mountain and into the river, churning up white foam on its jade surface.

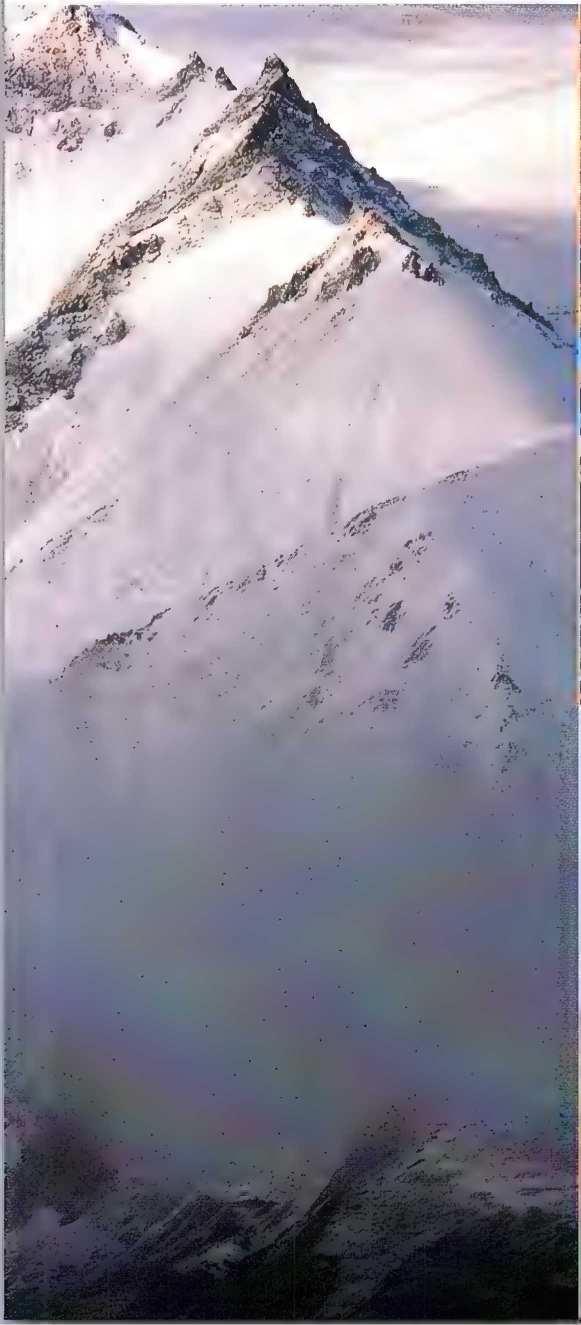
Having crossed the misnamed Kunlun Bridge, the train arrives at Naij Tal. "Tai" from the word "Naij Tal" means "post station. As its name implies, Naij Tal was a post station set up by the Mongolian in the ancient times. Since 1253 when the Yuan (1271—1368)

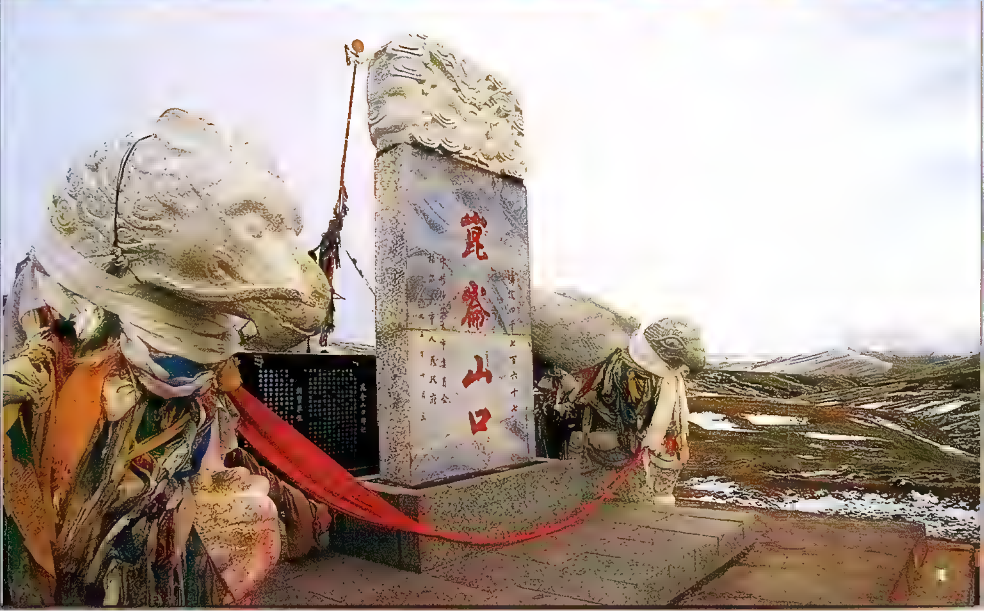
Mongolian Emperor Borjigin Mongke sent troops to Tibet to establish a local regime, King of Peace in the West — Luchi guarded the Golmud area. His son Tiemu'er and grandson Shuobansi had repeatedly stomped into Lhasa on the route of Naij Tal, Kunlun Pass, Taotao River (now Tuotuohe River), Danglaling Mountain (now Tanggula Mountain), Amdo, Heihe (now Nagqu), and Lhasa. The Qinghai-Tibet Highway and Railway were built basically along the route left from the Yuan Dynasty.Here, the melted snow water of Kunlun Spring gurgles at a fixed 7°C.

The railway bridge at Sanchahe is the highest such bridge along the Qinghai-Tibet Railway. The piers alone tower more than 50 metres. At Xidatan, the next stop, the landscape shifts to wide stretches of grassland dotted with yaks and tents, and the snow-capped peaks of the Kunlun Mountains can be seen in the distance. The hanging glacier of Yuzhu Peak is particularly vivid, seeming to wriggle like a white python — breathtaking views!

Since the train cannot zigzag up the mountain as cars and buses do to reach Kunlun Pass (4,767 metres above sea level), it tunnels through instead. If travelling by bus, one can see three monuments at the pass. One was damaged by a strong earthquake in 2001. Another newer one commemorates the 8.1-Richter scale quake. The third, the Shuonandajie Monument, honours the Tibetan hero who fought to protect the Tibetan antelope and died after being shot by poachers.

The Qinghai-Tibet Plateau has a long history of earthquakes. Seven quakes measuring 7 or higher on the Richter scale have shaken the area in modern times. The 2001 earthquake prompted geologists to call the fault zone a "golden key to the earth's interior". So earthquakes do pose a threat to the Qinghai-Tibet Railway.





1. Wild Tibetan donkeys gallop alongside the train at Hoh Xil. (by Cheng Weidong)

2. Driven by potentially huge profits, poachers slaughter up to 35,000 Tibetan antelopes every year. (by Cheng Weidong)

3. A wild yak charges after the "strange creature" that has breached its territory. (by Chegn Weidong)

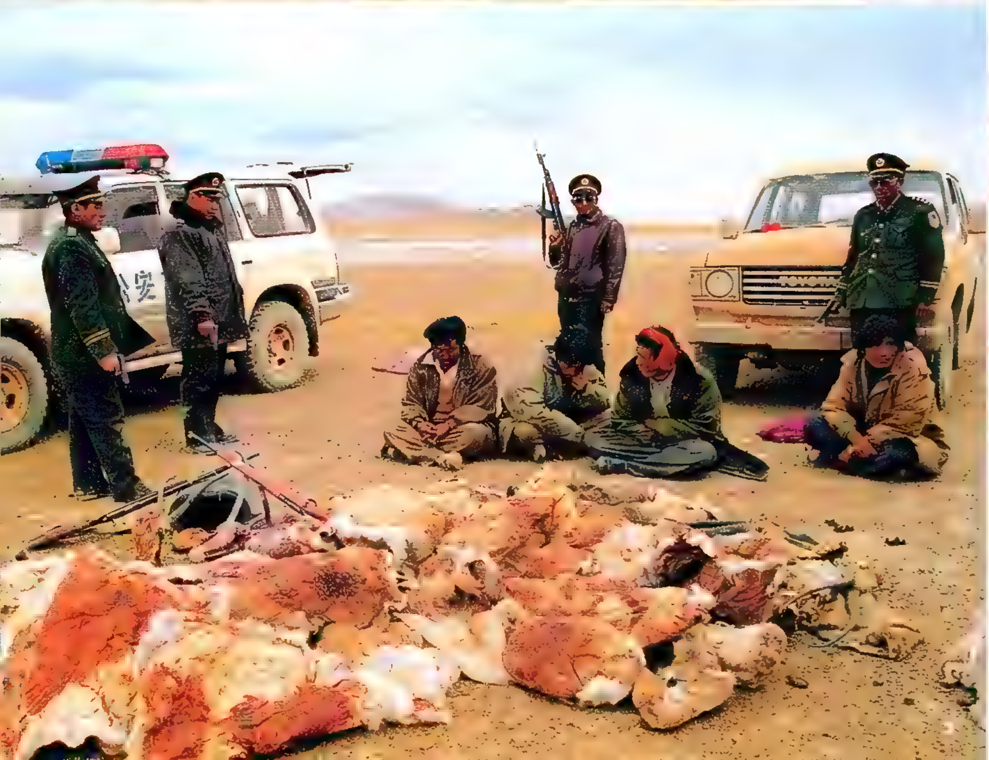
4. Hoh Xil is a wildlife paradise. The wild yak, wild donkey, white-lipped deer, brown bear and other endangered species once roamed the area freely. (by Cheng Weidong)

Hoh Xil — Habitat of Tibetan Antelopes

From Kunlun Mountain, the train heads to Budongquan (Never Frozen Spring). With its massive marshlands, lovely grassland and clear waters, the natural scenery here is stunning. Unfortunately, the marshy area was a headache for the railway builders as the permafrost thawed in the summer months. Building the railway on such ground would have been disastrous. Hoh Xil, habitat of the endangered Tibetan antelope, lies further south.

Hoh Xil means "beautiful maiden" in Mongolian. Most of the main rivers that feed the Yangtze originate in this area, which is considered the last piece of virgin territory in China. But antelope poachers have been causing problems. Driven by the promise of high profits on the black market, they have killed 500,000 Tibetan antelopes in less than 10 years. Fewer than 50,000 of the animals are now left.

The Suonandajie Natural Protection Station is half an hour's drive from Budongquan. The protection station, situated at the 2,952-km milestone of the Qinghai-Tibet Highway on the eastern side of Hoh Xil, was established by Yang Xin, an environmentalist from Sichuan Province. Various specimens of highland wildlife are on display at the station's exhibition hall, including an antelope skin, antelope horn, wild yak horn and the head of a brown bear, as well as



photographs taken at the poaching sites as evidence for criminal cases.

Crossing the Qumar River, a tributary of the Yangtze, the train reaches mountainous Wudaoliang, a settlement with restaurants, hotels and a military depot. As the city is hemmed in by the mountains, visitors are more susceptible to altitude sickness here than anywhere else along the journey.

Fenghuo (Wind and Fire) Mountain to the south is known for its strong winds. The highway curls back and forth up to the pass (5,010 metres above sea level), while the train chugs through the 4,905-metre high tunnel. It is most likely the highest tunnel on the Qinghai-Tibet Railway...perhaps the highest in the world.

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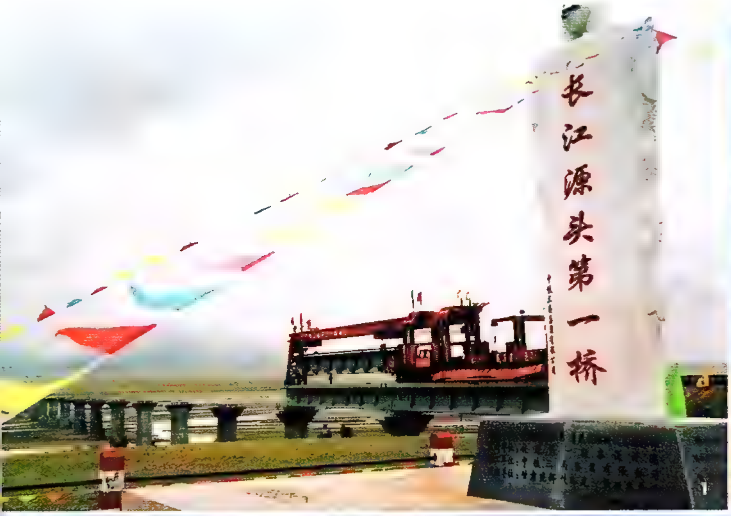
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Tuotuo River, Source of the Yangtze

Based on field surveys done in the 1970s, Chinese experts pinpointed the Tuotuo River as the uppermost source of the Yangtze. The Tuotuo and its tributaries form a tangled network of dozens of rivers. The river water is believed to get its reddish hue from rich iron ore deposits in the area's soil.

The old "No 1 Bridge of the Ten Thousand Li Yangtze River" was replaced by a new span in 2001. A longer railway bridge runs parallel to it. The place once known as Tuotuohe Township is now Tanggula Township. The fine buildings of the Xiwang (Hope) Primary School next door to the township government offices were donated by the Qinghai-Tibet Railway. More than 100 students, taught by 20 teachers, attend the school, which offers courses in both the Chinese and Tibetan languages. There are 300 Tibetan nomad households in the township. Compared with the primitive wasteland around them, the streets of Tanggula Township look extremely prosperous.

Entering Tibet via Tanggula Pass

The Wenquan (Hot Spring) Military Depot lies 35 km beyond the Tongtian River and Yanshiping. At the depot, the highway and the railway part company, one to the east and the other to the west. They run separately through the unpopulated areas of the Tanggula Mountains. After Tanggula Pass, the highest point on the line, they meet again in Amdo on the southern slopes of the mountain range.

Yanshiping is the only settlement between the Tuotuo River and the Tanggula Mountains. It is a town of restaurants and garages and not much else. Vehicles, mostly fully loaded cargo trucks bound for Tibet, park all along the road. Some 80% of all materials transported to Tibet arrive via the Qinghai-Tibet Highway. If the highway is blocked, someone once joked, meat prices in Lhasa go up by one yuan. The famous Tanggula Military Depot lies ahead, just a few dozen kilometres from Tanggula Pass.

Tanggula Mountain is the watershed of the Yangtze and Nujiang rivers as well as the natural divide between Qinghai Province and the Tibet Autonomous Region. At 5,231 metres above sea level, Tanggula Pass is the highest point on the Qinghai-Tibet Highway, not to mention the highest point on any highway in the world. Tanggula, meaning "even an eagle cannot fly over" in Mongolian and "mountain on the plateau" in Tibetan, is one of many mountains sacred to the Tibetan people. Two snow-covered peaks loom on either side of the pass. The western peak is Tanggula Mountain, 6,205 metres above sea level. The eastern one is Longyala Peak, 6,104 metres above sea level.

1. The Tuotuo River is the uppermost source of the Yangtze. Both the highway and railway bridges here deserve the title "No 1 Bridge of the Yangtze River". (by Cheng Weidong)

2. The highest point of the Qinghai-Tibet Railway is 5,072 metres above sea level, about 150 metres lower than the highest point on the Qinghai-Tibet Highway, 5,231 metres above sea level. (by Cheng Weidong)

3. Tibetan pilgrims prostrate themselves on their way to the holy city of Lhasa. (by Cheng Weidong)

4. The upper reaches of the Tuotuo River bring together melted snow water from the mountains and glaciers to form an intricate web of waterways. (by Yang Xin)

Amdo — No. 1 County in Northern Tibet

Amdo is 90 km from the Tanggula Pass, travelling downhill all the way. At Amdo, the altitude plunges to 4,700 metres and mobile phones start working again. Even so, the still high altitude will deter most travellers from staying overnight here. Instead, they hurry on to the next stop — Nagqu.

Amdo is called the "Northern Gateway to Tibet", thanks to its location. In the past, foreign missionaries and adventurers who were discovered trying to enter the "forbidden city" of Lhasa, often secretly or in disguise, were expelled here by the Tibetan government. Amdo County covers a total area of 100,000 sq km, about a quarter of Nagqu in northern Tibet, but only 30,000 people live here.

The Amdo County seat is quite small. After construction began on the Qinghai-Tibet Railway, the streets in town were widened to allow for more vehicles, and taller buildings went up. Such modernization has even brought public Internet houses to the foot of Tanggula Mountain. Businessmen and workers from all over the country share the streets with roaming sheep and cattle. The Amdo Railway Track Production Base is nearby. Beyond, the endless northern Tibet grassland fans out into the distance.

Co Nag, Source of the Nujiang

After their reunion, the highway and railway briefly part again after Amdo. The railway heads west, passes Co Nag Lake near the Selin Co Black-necked Crane Nature Reserve, and rejoins the highway at Karilongba. They then run parallel to each other until Nagqu.

Co Nag Lake spreads over an area of about 300 sq km. At 4,800 metres above sea level, it is the highest freshwater lake in the world. On the south side of Tanggula Mountain in Nagqu, nearly all the rivers and creeks feed into Co Nag Lake before being released into the Nujiang River. The Nujiang runs south into Yunnan Province and continues into Myanmar. Known as the Salween River outside China, it eventually joins the Indian Ocean.

Co Nag is sacred to local Tibetans. But the lake's once timeless tranquillity will surely be disrupted now that there is a train rumbling past.

Enchanting Qiangtang Grassland

Over the 130 km from Amdo to Nagqu the altitude drops to 4,500 metres above sea level. In 1269, the Yuan emperor dispatched troops to open up a post road into Tibet. The road passed today's Nagqu and Damxung cities. In the Ming and the Qing dynasties, Nagqu remained an important outpost of the stronger regime in the east.

After the train leaves Golmud, the landscape takes on an endless, surface-of-the-moon-like desolation. At Nagqu, it suddenly bursts to life again, with a wide variety of hotels and restaurants to choose from.

But the enchanting Qiangtang highland is the real attraction. If you disembark at Nagqu, be sure to drop in on a local Tibetan nomad family and try the natural fridge-free yogurt and savoury *zangba* (roasted barley served with butter, sugar and tea). Afterwards, pay homage to the Xiaodeng Monastery, the largest Tibetan Buddhist monastery in northern Tibet and the only monastery right next to the Qinghai-Tibet Railway on the Golmud to Nagqu route.

Each August, the rivers thaw and flow freely, flowers bloom and the earth shakes off winter white in favour of greener garb. This is the most beautiful season on the Qiangtang highland. The annual horse races usually held at this time attract spectators from all over the region. In just one night, thousands of tents appear on the grassland near Nagqu, like an overnight alien invasion.

1. A western tourist smiles for the camera at Tanggula Mountain pass 5,072 metres above sea level. (by Guo Jingwen)

2. The train winds through the bitterly cold but beautiful Qinghai-Tibet Plateau. (by Li Dan)

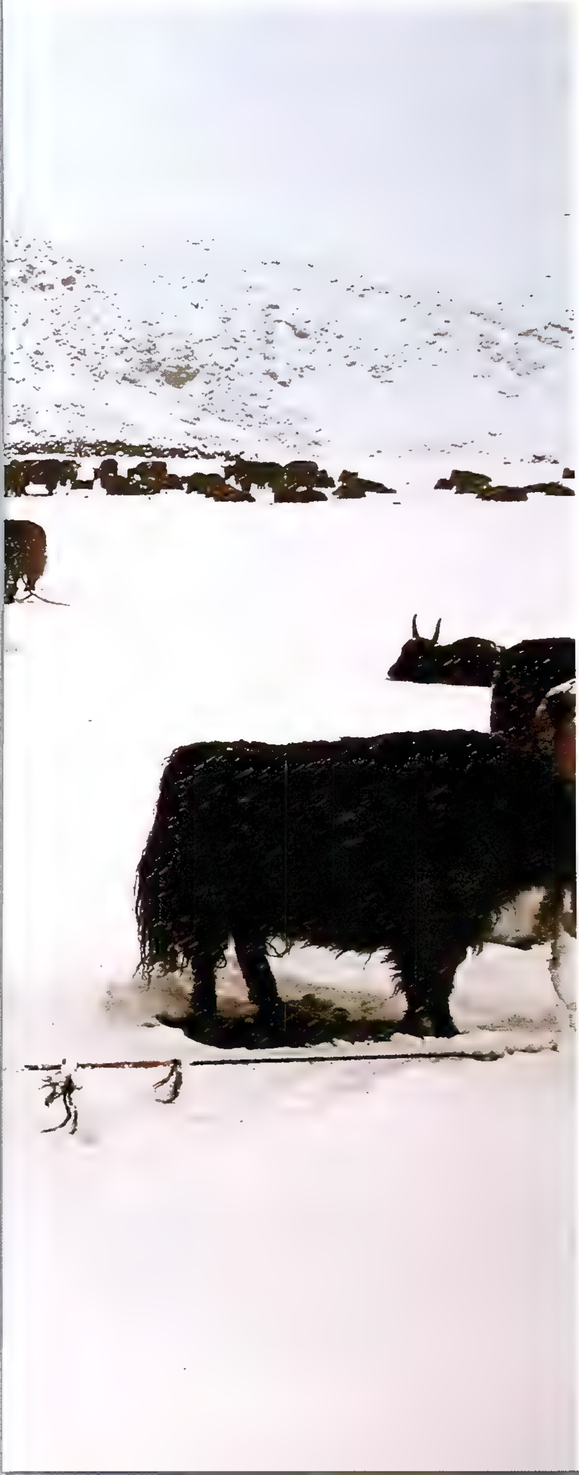
3. The Amdo County seat was once a quiet, little hamlet. Thanks to the railway, it's now a bustling town. (by Cheng Weidong)

Damxung, North Gate of Lhasa

As the train heads further south, the altitude continues to drop and the weather warms up. My breathing, so quick at the mountain pass, has slowed down. At Damxung, the altitude falls below 4,300 metres above sea level and the vegetation is by far the best I've seen along the Qinghai-Tibet Railway.

The administrative district of Damxung, or "the chosen meadow" in Tibetan, can lay claim to two world records, for the highest saltwater lake, Nam Co, and the highest terrestrial heat source, Yangbajain. Damxung is also home to Nyainqêntanglha Mountain, where a little Tibetan girl called Dawa Yangzhong lit the "holy fire" at the start of the Asian Games in 1990.

All along the highway on the way to the Damxung County seat, local Tibetans try to wave down passing vehicles to sell Chinese caterpillar fungi, fritillary lily bulbs, snow lotus herbs, fresh mushrooms and other local produce gathered from the mountains. When a car stops, eager vendors rush to encircle it. Due to the craze for certain expensive herbs in recent years, vegetation on the grassland has been seriously damaged. Shops, hotels, guest houses and garages line the roadsides, along with dance halls, nightclubs and karaoke bars. Business seems to be booming.



Yangbajain Hot Springs

Some 80 km west of Damxung, the China-Nepal and Qinghai-Tibet highways intersect at Yangbajain. We are now just 90 km from Lhasa. Worn out from the long trip, we were thrilled to learn that we could stop at a hot spring here to freshen up before continuing to our final destination.

The ground beneath Yangbajain is rich in geothermal activity, with all sorts of springs, geysers, and even a warm-water lake distributed over a wide area. Hot water gushes out of the ground here all year long. The quantity of heat generated by the hot water and steam can exceed 100,000 thermal units per second. The heat it generates in a day is equal to the amount of heat produced by burning 450,000 tons of standard coal each year. In 1997 a geothermal power station was built in Yangbajain to put this abundant natural resource to use.

Yangbajain is at its most charming in the morning. A soothing soak in the hot springs of Yangbajain is highly recommended as the perfect way to relax following your long journey. There are indoor and outdoor swimming pools as well as smaller indoor spas with water temperatures of up to 47°C. Prices range from a few dozen to a hundred yuan or so. Visitors are advised not to exert too much energy while soaking in the hot springs due to the higher consumption of oxygen on the highland. And it's best to limit your time in the hot spring bath to avoid exhaustion.

Heading south from Yangbajain, we reached Yangbajain Valley where the railway and highway run on opposite sides of the river. Near Doilung Deqen, residential houses and fields come into view. Dense highland barley gently sways and golden rape flowers give off a pleasant fragrance. Red, yellow, blue, white and green prayer flags symbolizing fire, earth, sky and clouds flutter on the flat-topped clay roofs of the Tibetan-style houses. A paved road winds along the river towards Lhasa.

1. Only yaks can withstand the high altitude and harsh environment on the highland of Nagqu, once known as Qiangtang, in northern Tibet. (by Cheng Weidong)

2. Nomads on a seasonal pastoral migration pass by Nyainqentanglha Mountain. Their yaks carry packs of dried yak dung, which serves as cooking and heating fuel. (by Cheng Weidong)

3. The geothermal heat produced in Yangbajain each day equals the amount of heat generated by burning 450,000 tons of standard coal each year. (by Cheng Weidong)

Lhasa — End of the Line

The Qinghai-Tibet Railway runs a total distance of 1,956 km from Xining to Lhasa. When the journey ends, what will you do? Well, that's up to you.

Situated 3,600 metres above sea level, Lhasa is the capital of the Tibet Autonomous Region. The city's urban area is not large. Three of the six major monasteries of Lamaism, or Tibetan Buddhism, are located here, along with the world famous Potala Palace. You can visit Drepung Monastery in the west, Sera Monastery in the north and Gaden Monastery in Taktse County. Other famous religious sites include the legendary Jokhang Monastery, built in the seventh century by the Tubo King Songtsan Gambo for Tang princess Wen Cheng. Then there's Norbulingka, the idyllic summer resort of the Dalai Lamas.

Twenty years ago, Lhasa had only one paved road. Stray dogs wandered about and ragged children begged for money in the streets, hugging the legs of tourists or hanging onto their clothing. There were no taxis; you walked or maybe rented a bike to get around. Bathing was too much to ask, as in the entire city there was only one public bath; hotels did not normally provide showering facilities. Things are quite different now. Luxury hotels, fancy restaurants, hostels and guest houses have sprouted up everywhere, along with teahouses, cafes, pubs, galleries, bookstores and Internet cafes... Today's Lhasa has everything its wealthier coastal cousins have, and often better, trendier options. But of course, like anywhere else, you need to pay for them.

Translated by Zhang Boli

1. Potala Palace, the residence of the Dalai Lamas, is a holy place for worshippers. (by Cheng Weidong)

2. Lhasa, at the end of the Qinghai-Tibet Railway line, is a trendy metropolis today. With the train comes the impact of alien cultures, but the once "forbidden city" seems to be absorbing them well. (by Zhao Zhiyan)

电话超市

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...TAKING THE TRAIN

Photos & Article • Ma Yiu Chun

The Golmud-Lhasa section of the Qinghai-Tibet Railway began operating on July 1, 2006 as planned. This means the "heavenly" grazing road to the snowy region is no longer as long or as difficult as before. Travellers wishing to visit Tibet but worried about altitude sickness can now go direct to Lhasa, capital of the Tibet Autonomous Region, in comfort on a train equipped with oxygen supplies for each passenger.

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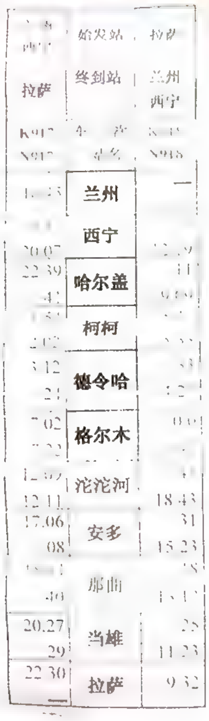

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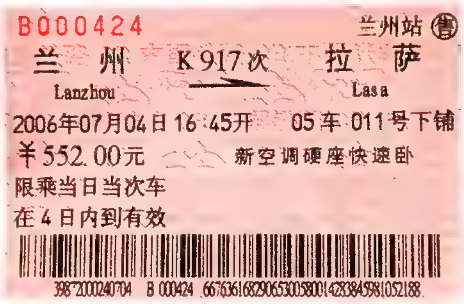

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When I boarded Train K917 from Lanzhou to Lhasa to begin my trip, I had many questions. I wondered if the train's trial operation will go smoothly, passengers will be allowed time to take pictures at the scenic stops along the way, I Will sleep well on the train, I can alight at certain stations to visit other places, and if there are enough facilities to cope with emergencies, such as several passengers suffering altitude sickness at the same time.

JULY 4 Sleeper Tickets Available

My train departed from Lanzhou on July 4, crewed by the same people who served on the very first train journey from Xining to Lhasa on July 1. They had been working without a break for four days, but would have time off after this trip, when they returned to Xining. Even during their two previous stops in Xining, they did not go home.

I thought it would be difficult to get a ticket, especially for a sleeper, as I planned to travel during the railway's first two weeks of operation. So I booked one at a travel agency in Lanzhou a month ahead of schedule. Much to my surprise, when I reached Lanzhou Railway Station on the 4th there were still many sleeper tickets available, both for hard sleepers and berths. Only the hard-seat tickets were sold out. Most of the people going to Tibet for temporary work could not afford a sleeper, but many waited outside the ticket office for any returned tickets. After boarding, I saw that the train had only two hard-seat carriages; the rest were all for hard sleepers or berths.

20:10 Reaching Xining, the Starting Point

The train arrived in Xining three hours later. From there, it would be running along the Qinghai-Tibet Railway. The distance between Xining and Golmud was covered overnight, leaving the onward journey for the daytime so that passengers could feast their eyes on the ever-changing landscape outside. Still, there are many attractive scenic spots in the first section, such as the Jin Yin Tan (Golden & Silvery Beach), Qinghai Lake, Caka Salt Lake, and the high Qarhan Salt Bridge.

As we travelled through this area, I could not help thinking of the songs "The Tibetan Plateau" performed by Li Na and "The Heavenly Road" sung by Han Hong. The former, which has been popular for over 10 years, expresses the love for and sense of expectation excited by the highland; the beautiful tune and Li Na's soaring voice give the song a particular intensity. The latter depicts the building of the Qinghai-Tibet Railway in a similarly charming fashion. During the first month of the railway's operations, the song was played by all major TV and radio stations in China. On the train I was taking, it was broadcast three to five times an hour.

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08:05 Reaching Golmud

After passing through Qaidam Basin overnight, the train reached Qarhan at 6:53 a.m., from where it would take another hour to reach Golmud. By the time we arrived at Golmud at 8:05 a.m., we were already about an hour behind schedule. It was raining and windy, and the temperature hovered around 10°C. Few passengers were interested in disembarking to take photos in such weather. The platform on which President Hu Jintao had spoken at the Qinghai-Tibet Railway's opening ceremony on July 1 had already been dismantled; only the wooden foundation and some red banners remained. After 20 minutes, the conductor urged passengers to return to the train, leaving the station suddenly desolate again.

Golmud marks the starting point of the second section of the Qinghai-Tibet Railway, which runs 1,142 km south to Lhasa. Within a day, the train passes through a series of characteristic landscapes, including the 4,000 metre-high Kunlun Mountains, Hoh Xil Reserve, Tuotuo River, Tanggula Mountain, Lake Nam Co and Qiangtang Grassland. This is the best section of the journey and passengers can see all of the sights during the daytime. Tourists took up most of the seats around me; others, from inland, had been working in Tibet for years. All of us

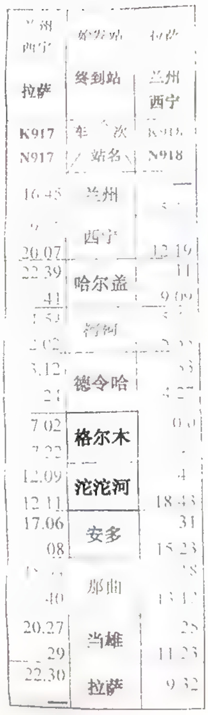
Previous spread: The Qinghai-Tibet Railway train is equipped with specially made engines manufactured by the US firm General Electric. (by Jue Guo)

1. The train from Lanzhou sets off in the afternoon, so that passengers can enjoy the scenery the next day.

2. In the hard-sleeper carriage.

3. The train to Lhasa ("Lasa" as shown on the train) starts from Lanzhou on July 4.

4. The hard-sleeper carriage is also well equipped.



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3.12 [illegible]	德令哈	[illegible]
7.02 7.22	格尔木	[illegible]
12.09 12.11	沱沱河	4 18.43
17.06 08	安多	31 15.23
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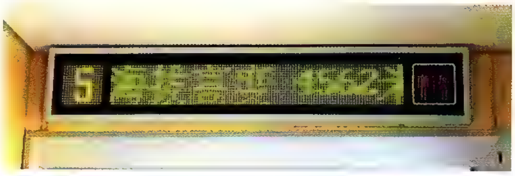
20.27 29	当雄	25 11.23
22.30	拉萨	9.32

were going to Lhasa, although Train K917 would stop at stations in Tuotuo River, Amdo, Nagqu and Damxung during the trip. Due to inconvenient lodging and transportation at stops along the route, as well as the tough weather conditions, passengers are better off staying on the train to observe the scenery. Furthermore, no set timetable has yet been established for the train other than the starting and ending points, making it difficult to plan extended side trips along the way. The conductor showed me the timetable in his pocket during the journey, but only as a special favour.

09:30 On to the Kunlun Mountains

According to his timetable, we were supposed to leave Golmud at 7:22 a.m., but it was 9:30 a.m. before the train finally moved. The passengers cheered as we left Golmud (altitude: 2,828 metres above sea level). All at once, cameras, video recorders and binoculars appeared, ready for the upcoming scenery. In the meantime, the conductor began handing out oxygen tubes to the passengers, together with a pamphlet entitled "Handbook for Travelling on the Qinghai-Tibet Railway", which explained the train's oxygen supply facilities and provided tips on travelling at high altitudes.

Soon the train reached Nanshankou (South Mountain Pass) where the rails once ended more than 20 years ago. The construction of the former railway

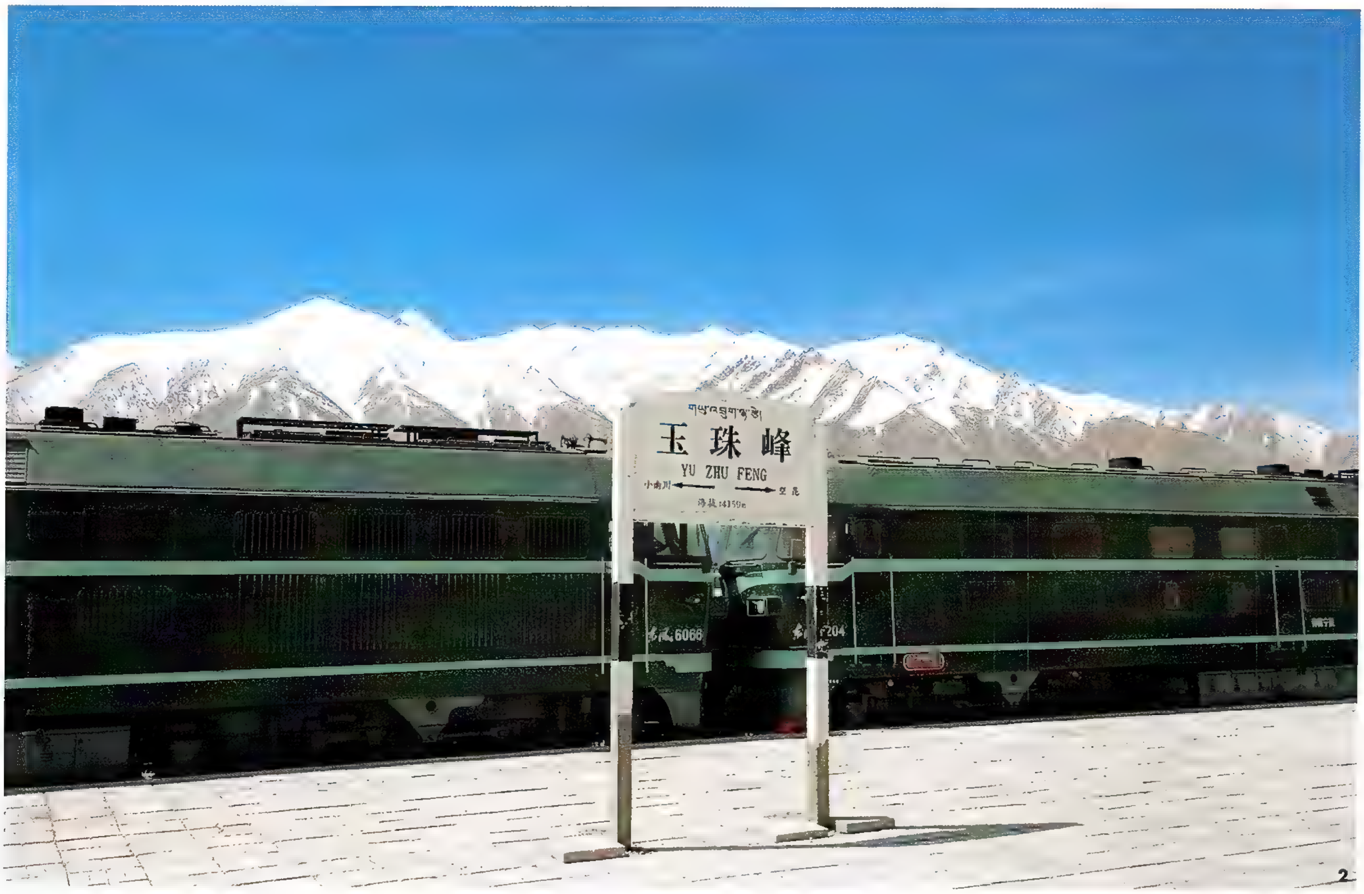


was stopped due to the engineering problem of how to lay tracks on the permanently frozen earth. As we clicked over the rails in the comfort of the temperature-regulated carriage, oxygen relief at the ready, my heart beat with gratitude for the people who made it all possible.

After passing Nanshankou, the train began to climb to higher altitudes. We had ascended 1,000 metres in 100 km and would keep rising as the train headed towards the Kunlun Mountains. This mountain range, considered the "ancestor" of all other mountains on the Qinghai-Tibet Highland, is also the first challenging pass for those visiting the area for the first time. I was ready to greet it with the reverence it deserved.

10:45 Jade Pearl Peak

As we entered the Kunlun Mountains, most of the passengers were all right but a few felt uncomfortable and needed to inhale some oxygen. I think some of them were more affected by worrying too much. Uncle Tian, in his 60s, and Little Wu, 23, were in my



carriage. Both belonged to a Tianjin tourist group that had set off from Beijing on July 1. In the mountains, Uncle Tian showed no signs of altitude sickness and busied himself taking photos and videos. Little Wu, the younger and supposedly stronger one, suffered a headache and spent most of his time sleeping.

We reached Jade Pearl Peak Station at 10:45 a. m., but this was not announced and the train did not stop. I knew where we were by checking my map and observing the scenery outside the window. Jade Pearl Peak, 6,178 metres above sea level, is the summit of the Kunlun Mountains. As it is snow-capped all year round, it is not difficult to recognize when you look left out of the train windows. The route is still new to crew members, who may not be familiar with all the scenic spots, so do your homework and pay attention to the passing scenery or you'll miss many of the best sights.

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11:10 Snow in July

After passing Jade Pearl Peak, a video screen in the carriage showed that we had reached an altitude of 4,478 metres above sea level. From the Kunlun Mountains, the train would run for 960 km at heights of more than 4,000 metres.

At 11:10 a.m., the world outside turned white and snowflakes drifted past — an unbelievable sight in July! The train passed Budongquan (Never Frozen Spring) 20 minutes later and entered Hoh Xil, the exclusive habitat of the rare Tibetan antelopes. Many of us, some with binoculars in hand, drew close to the windows in hopes of seeing the charming creatures. A few gazelle-like shapes appeared in the distance, but we mainly saw herds of grazing sheep, often mistaking them for gazelles at first.

At 11:57 a.m., the train passed the Qumar River, another source of the Yangtze. Wudaoliang lay ahead and it was here that pre-railway travellers were most easily susceptible to altitude sickness. We were not afraid, though; we had our oxygen supply onboard.

At 1:10 p.m., we barrelled through the Fenghuoshan (Wind & Fire Mountain) Tunnel. At 4,905 metres above sea level, it is the world's highest tunnel built on permafrost. It took us only about a minute to pass through the 1,338 metre-long tunnel, hardly enough time to imagine the hardships the engineers and workers endured when they drilled it.

We passed Yanshiping at 3:35 p.m. With its many restaurants, inns and garages, it is a popular highland truck stop. Truckers can have a meal, check their engines and fill their fuel tanks before driving through the highest and most dangerous section of the road — the Tanggula Mountain Pass (altitude: more than 5,000 km above sea level).

The train stopped for more than an hour at

5

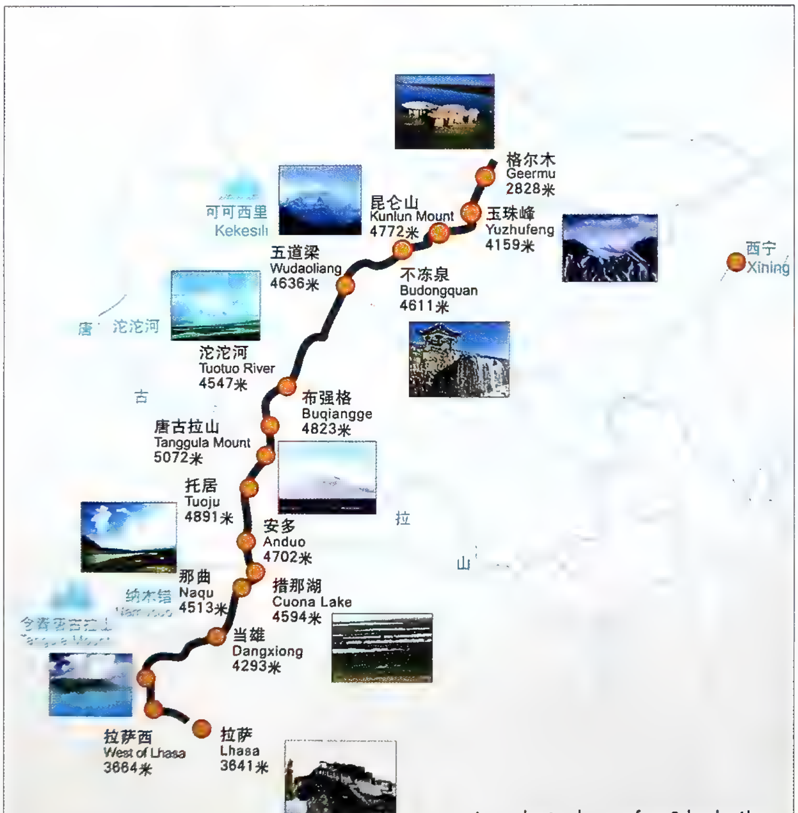
1. The altitude is displayed in each carriage in three languages: Chinese, Tibetan and English.

2. You can have good view of Jade Pearl Peak from the comfort of your carriage. (by Jue Guo)

3. Snowfall is common on the highland in July. (by Jue Guo)

4. Each seat is equipped with an oxygen tube.

5. A train passes the Lhasa River. (by Jue Guo)


格尔木
Geermu
2828米
玉珠峰
Yuzhufeng
4159米
昆仑山
Kunlun Mount
4772米
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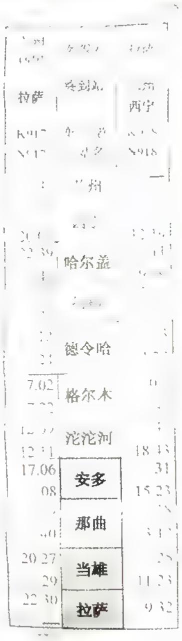
Kekesili
西宁
Xining
五道梁
Wudaoliang
4636米
不冻泉
Budongquan
4611米
沱沱河
沱沱河
Tuotuo River
4547米
布强格
Buqiangge
4823米
唐古拉山
Tanggula Mount
5072米
托居
Tuoju
4891米
安多
Anduo
4702米
那曲
Naqu
4513米
纳木错
措那湖
Cuona Lake
4594米
当雄
Dangxiong
4293米
拉萨西
West of Lhasa
3664米
拉萨
Lhasa
3641米

A map showing the route from Golmud to Lhasa


拉萨
西宁
哈尔盖
德令哈
格尔木
沱沱河
安多
那曲
当雄
拉萨

1. Tanggula Railway Station is built to resemble the Chinese character for "mountain". (by Jue Guo)

2. These Tibetan passengers are very excited. (by Jue Guo)

3. Lhasa Railway Station, built in the Tibetan architectural style. (by Jue Guo)

Bujiangge station at the foot of Tanggula Mountain in order to let three other trains, from Lhasa to Beijing West, Chengdu/Chongqing and Xining/Lanzhou respectively, pass. As the railway is single-tracked, this will be a common occurrence.

17:55 Tanggula Mountain Pass

At 5:27 p.m. the train started again and Tanggula Railway Station was soon announced as the highest railway station in the world. Bored by the long wait at the previous station, the passengers perked up again. Because we would not stop at the station, we had to keep our eyes on the windows for fear of missing it.

Tanggula Railway Station, built in the shape of the Chinese character for "mountain", appeared at 5:55 p.m. A dozen or so people, presumably railway workers, stood on the platform. My respect for them rose as I considered the punishing living and working conditions they faced.

At 6:13 p.m., we reached Tanggula South station, which was much smaller than the one on the north side of the mountain. At 6:30 p.m., we looked for but could not see the peaks of the Tanggula Mountains. But on the right, Hongshan (Red Mountain), which resembles an ancient fortress due to its rugged rocks, came into view.

We arrived in Amdo at 7:10 p.m. This was the first town we met after leaving Golmud. Several passengers wearing Tibetan costume alighted here. The train parked at this station for 45 minutes, instead of the scheduled two minutes, bringing our overall delay to three hours.

We started moving again at 7:55 p.m., but were interrupted with frequent stops. Around 8:10 p.m., we reached Nam Co, a major scenic spot along the route. As the rails run along the lake, we enjoyed scenery that highway travellers would never see. Sunset had passed, so the lake was not quite as vivid as it appears in many photos. Had we not been delayed so long, we might have had had a more stunning view. It seems a pity, too, that the train does not stop here to let travellers stroll by the lakeside.

It was dark by 8:40 p.m. when the train left the lake and continued towards the fertile Qiangtang Grassland. We arrived in Nagqu at 9:55 p.m. This time, we only stopped for two minutes, to try and make up time, I guessed. At 11:45 p.m. we arrived in Damxung, a town near Lake Nam Co. Visitors usually set off for the lake from here.

01:33 Lhasa, at Last

After we passed Damxung, the conductor turned on all the lights and began cleaning the carriage. Meanwhile, the passengers got their tickets back by returning their boarding cards. Soon we would arrive in Lhasa. At 1:33 a.m. the train pulled into the magnificent, Tibetan-style Lhasa Railway Station in the rain. As it had been scheduled to arrive at 22:30 p.m., we were still three hours behind.

The 33-hour journey had finally ended. Feeling recharged, I walked out of the station and jumped onto a bus to the Jiqu Hotel in the downtown area across the Lhasa River. I took a shower and then happily lay down on the clean, comfortable bed.

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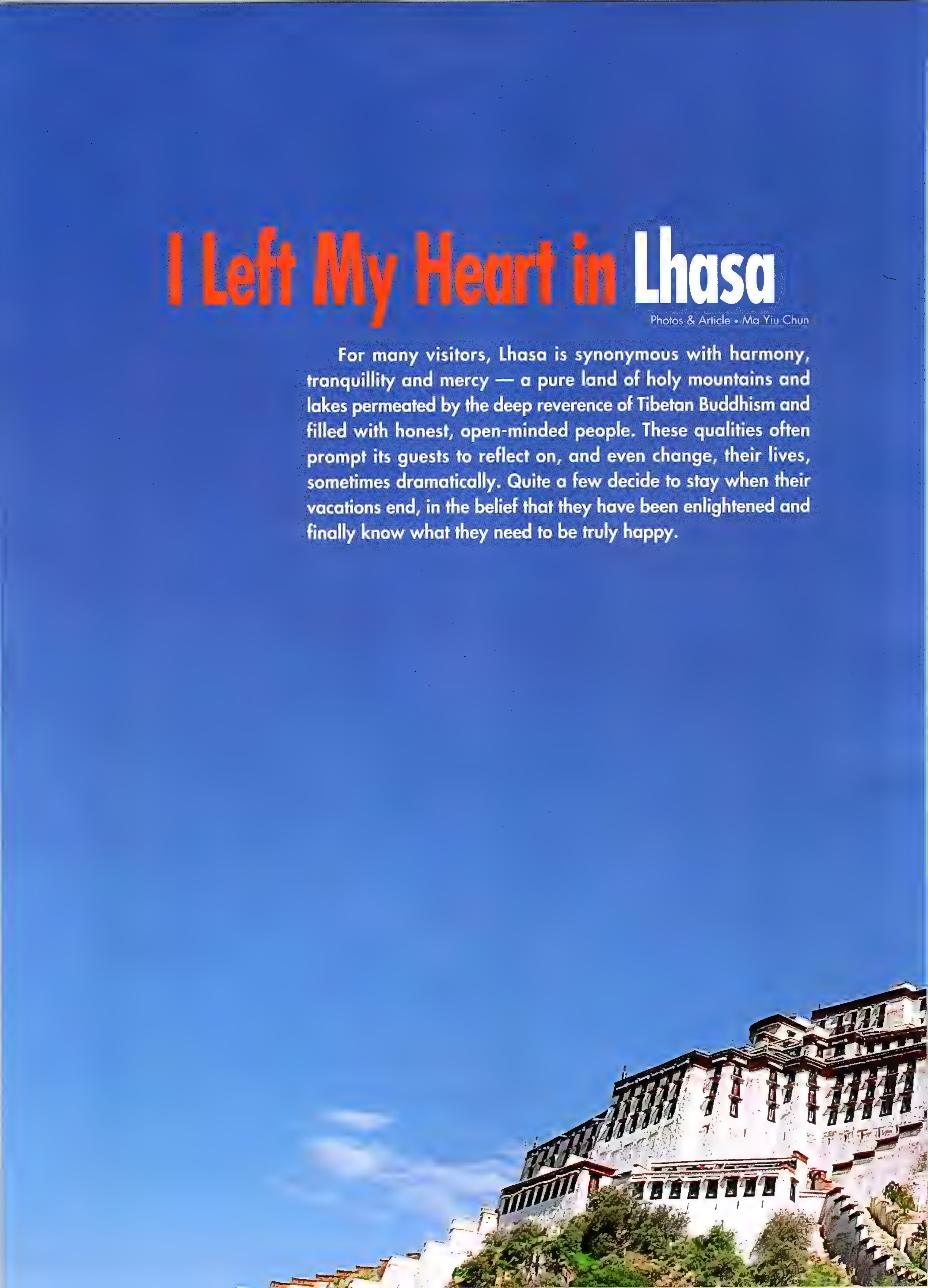
I Left My Heart in Lhasa

Photos & Article • Ma Yiu Chun

For many visitors, Lhasa is synonymous with harmony, tranquillity and mercy — a pure land of holy mountains and lakes permeated by the deep reverence of Tibetan Buddhism and filled with honest, open-minded people. These qualities often prompt its guests to reflect on, and even change, their lives, sometimes dramatically. Quite a few decide to stay when their vacations end, in the belief that they have been enlightened and finally know what they need to be truly happy.



Somebody once said it was lucky enough to make one trip to Lhasa in a lifetime. So I felt doubly blessed to visit a second time, even if it was 23 years after my first trip.

Sweet Memories

Recollections of my first visit to Lhasa remain as fresh as if they had taken place yesterday. I remember taking a bath once a month; going to the cafeteria for meals strictly on time, lest I should go hungry; walking to the distant Sera and Drepung monasteries, each trip taking more than two hours.... Back then, the houses in front of the Potala Palace were all one-storey and the square was not terribly attractive. I seem to recall the entry charge to the Potala being 10 or 20 cents - less than 50 cents, anyway - but there were never many visitors then. Today, an entry ticket costs 100 yuan! There is always a long queue, and it is said the price will be raised again soon. Before, there was no square at the Jokhang Temple or handicraft stalls lining the larger streets and smaller lanes. Life was rustic and honest. During the Shoton Festival, people set up tents at Norbulingka, and each family, including all its members, young and old, gathered there to sip *qingke* wine and butter tea. They sang and chatted and had a good time. A Tibetan Opera, the first one I'd ever seen, was performed by the Tibetans themselves, free of charge. I will never forget the open, smiling faces of the Tibetans I met.

I don't mean to suggest that Tibet or its people should have remained backward or that tourists should go through the same hardships I did. My concern is that over the past 10 years "new cities" have been created all over China...and they all look the same. I didn't want to see a Lhasa that had lost its identity. I didn't want my long-cherished memories tarnished by the drive to modernize. So I was hesitant to return. On the other hand, I longed to see it again.

A few years ago, some friends who had visited Lhasa told me the city had retained its distinctive style, that the new structures had not really affected its essential character. So when the Qinghai-Tibet Railway began operating, I knew it was time to go back.

Highland Kiss

In July, while much of China sweltered under a heat wave and the temperature in Hong Kong rose to 35°C, it was pleasantly cool in Lhasa. As the temperature ranged from 10 ~ 25°C, I wore a light coat in the mornings and evenings, and instead of switching on the air conditioner each night, I snuggled up under a padded quilt. The oxygen content in the air was 70 percent of that inland, but it was the highest rate in a year. The ancient Tibetan monarch certainly made a wise decision when he chose Lhasa to be the capital of his Tubo Kingdom.

Of all China's capital cities, Lhasa may have the fewest high buildings, fewer even than the fingers on one hand. Its tall buildings perch on the edge of the urban area, away from the Potala Palace, the heart of the city. Most houses within the city limits are three- or four-storey structures, built in the traditional Tibetan architectural style.

I chose not to use any sunblock as I walked through the streets, because I wanted my visit to leave a sort of mark on me, like a "kiss" bestowed by the Qinghai-Tibet Highland. I thought it would make me feel closer to the place.

Tricycles, or pedicabs, are the main means of transport in Lhasa. In Beijing, such vehicles tend to be hired by tourists wanting to tour the *hutongs*. Both convenient and environmentally friendly, they fit Lhasa's slow pace well and are widely used.

Interestingly, flies also move slower in Lhasa, possibly because of the diminished oxygen supply. They do not fear people — Tibetans never catch or kill them (only the Han buy flyswatters). The flies are extraordinarily big, however, and easily mistaken for bees. I suppose the locals don't consider flies dirty because their environment is so clean and the air is so fresh.

Solemn, Holy Call from Potala

I revisited the Potala and happily found it much the

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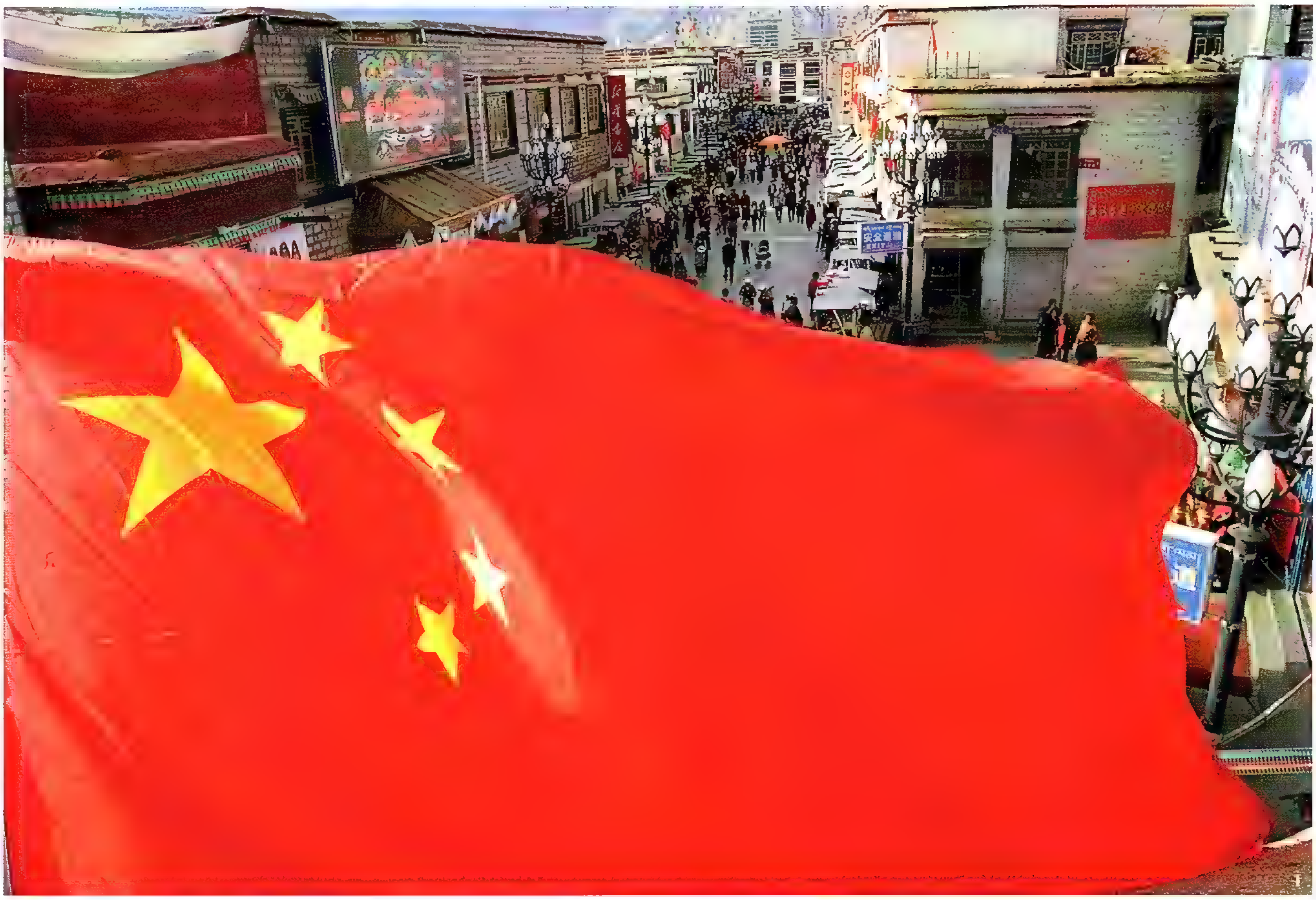
Previous spread:The Potala Palace remains as lovely as it was 23 years ago.

1. Pedicabs are the most convenient and environmentally friendly way to tour Lhasa.

2. The old lanes of Lhasa are like the *hutongs* of Beijing.

3. Popular music and films can be found throughout Lhasa.

4. In the heat of July, lamas must shield their heads from the scorching sun while passing along Barkor Street.



same. From outside I saw no obvious changes, apart from some huge ribbons expressing thanks for the concern of the CPC Central Committee and support from the National People's Congress.

As I gazed up at the magnificent building, I felt a solemn, holy call, a vibration stronger than any I had felt at the Tian'anmen Gate or the Palace Museum in Beijing. After visiting the palace, I walked east along the newly built Yutuo Road to reach the old urban district. Here, just beyond the Jokhang Temple and Barkor Street, I knew I would find the real, everyday Lhasa.

Yutuo Road, a very modern shopping street, is clean, quiet and stylish in its way. It is paved with huge marble slabs and lined with huge trees. There are even artificial palm trees strung with lights. I felt completely carefree walking along. In the many shops you can find Tibetan medications and beautiful regional garments, as well as internationally franchised brands such as Nike.

Barkor Street: Portrait of Local Life

Barkor Street has great religious significance: followers of Buddhism come here to walk around the Jokhang Temple in a clockwise circle. At the same time it is a commercial street lined with vendors loudly hawking their wares from their stalls. I prefer the back lanes, where the citizens of Lhasa reside. In some ways, the lanes resemble the *hutongs* of Beijing. In the big courtyards and small houses, elderly men and women can be seen chatting together and waving their prayer wheels. Local Tibetans often gather in the sweet tea houses to watch videos of action films. The shops in these lanes sell such practical items as butter, wheat flour and iron trunks instead of handicrafts. Roam through these lanes after visiting the Jokhang Temple for a vivid picture of how the locals really live. It will quickly bring you back to reality.

Many people still regard Lhasa as a backward place lacking in basic amenities. Sister Liao Qin, who has lived in Lhasa since her marriage 10 years ago, said her family in Sichuan Province always thought she was only telling them the good things about Lhasa to cover up what they imagined to be an otherwise miserable life there. How mistaken they were. She and her Tibetan husband live in a large house with about 200 square metres of floor space and a 100 square-metre garden, something many city dwellers in China can only dream of. She simply described it as "a nice place".

A relative coming to visit her from Shanghai asked what she needed to bring and whether there was electric lighting. Although Sister Liao explained that everything was available in Lhasa, the woman still brought a big suitcase filled with items she could have easily bought here.

A trip to the supermarket may amaze you. Every product you can think of is available, including the cool herbal tea Wanglaoji. In addition to the usual daily necessities and fresh vegetables, there is fruit from all over the country — bananas from Hainan, peaches from Sichuan, watermelons from Lanzhou, grapes from Xinjiang and apples from Shaanxi. In short, it's not much different from a Shenzhen supermarket. The prices are a bit higher than in inland cities, but still much cheaper than Hong Kong. And instead of plastic bags, the cashier packs everything into environmentally friendly carrier bags. Plastic bags have long been forbidden by Lhasa's supermarkets in an effort to cut down on pollution. By contrast, many larger and supposedly more "advanced" cities, including Hong Kong, are way behind on this issue.

Moved by Snow-capped Mountains

Sister Liao loves Lhasa, but not for the weather or the goods on sale. The city was underdeveloped when she came to Lhasa in 1992 to study painting. But when she saw the snowy mountain peaks from the airplane, she was moved to tears. The air hostess was shocked and wondered what was wrong with her. The moment she stepped from the plane she told herself she would find a way to stay.

Thereafter, she travelled back and forth between her actual home and her new spiritual home, drawn back by the landscapes and the lifestyle of the Tibetan people, both of which inspired her paintings. In 1997, on her fourth visit, she knew she had left her heart here and could no longer return to her former life. She met and married Jueguo, a Tibetan photographer who grew up on the grassland of Nam Co. Their romance is well known in Lhasa. After they married, Sister Liao continued to paint, but also started an advertising business. Then she opened a Tibetan bar on Barkor Street where backpackers could rest and share their experiences and photographs. She said she owed Lhasa greatly for helping her find her ideal life, as well as the man she loves.

1.38元
原价:2.50元
4.90元
6.80元
原价:16.00元
8.80元
QQ糖500g
原价:12.00元

1. Barkor Street captures the spirit of Lhasa.

2. A newly opened shop decorated with congratulatory streamers.

3. Lhasa's supermarkets aren't much different from Shenzhen's.

4. Residents enjoy a Hong Kong film at a local teahouse.

Following the Sun

Yang An, in her 20s, was also reluctant to leave Lhasa on her first visit. A native of Lanzhou in Gansu Province, she craves sunlight and abhors cloudy, rainy days. After graduating from college, she lived and worked in Shenzhen for three years. Every year for her vacation she'd spend a whole month in Lhasa, basking in the sunshine and visiting the surrounding areas. She was also deeply moved by the rich religious atmosphere and eventually came to appreciate the broad principles of Buddhism.

During one of her visits, the owner of a steamed bun shop told her about another shop near the Jokhang Temple that was for lease. Since she loved Lhasa and visited every year, why didn't she rent it? The suggestion seemed strange to Yang An at first, but it soon piqued her interest. Without much hesitation, she decided to take the shop and stay permanently in the place she loved. But what sort of shop could she

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run? Since she was interested in the ethnic clothing and decorative items of Tibet, India and Nepal, she decided to start a business selling them. She gave her shop the Buddhist name of Mandala.

Compared to Sister Liao and Yang An, youth hostel owner, He Jian made up her mind far more quickly. She fell in love with Lhasa the first time she saw it; on her second visit, she was a citizen.

During my first few days in Lhasa, I stayed in the Kyichu Hotel Lhasa on East Beijing Road. A week later, however, I was forced to move. An overseas tourist group had booked the whole hotel, Ten Dron, one of the clerks, informed me with regret. But she kindly helped me find another place to stay. I moved to the Phuntsok Khasang International Youth Hostel, which had been in business just two months. It was there that I encountered He Jian.

Hotel Owner from Beijing

He Jian who always wears a kind smile on her face is from Beijing, where she worked for an IT company, a job many young people in China would envy. She visited Lhasa for the first time last year and was instantly attracted by its relaxed pace, so different from the bustling, high-pressure world she inhabited.

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Fortunately, several of her friends felt the same, so they decided to do something together. One, Feiquan, suggested they open an inn for backpackers as such places are still in great demand. The others agreed and they got to work.

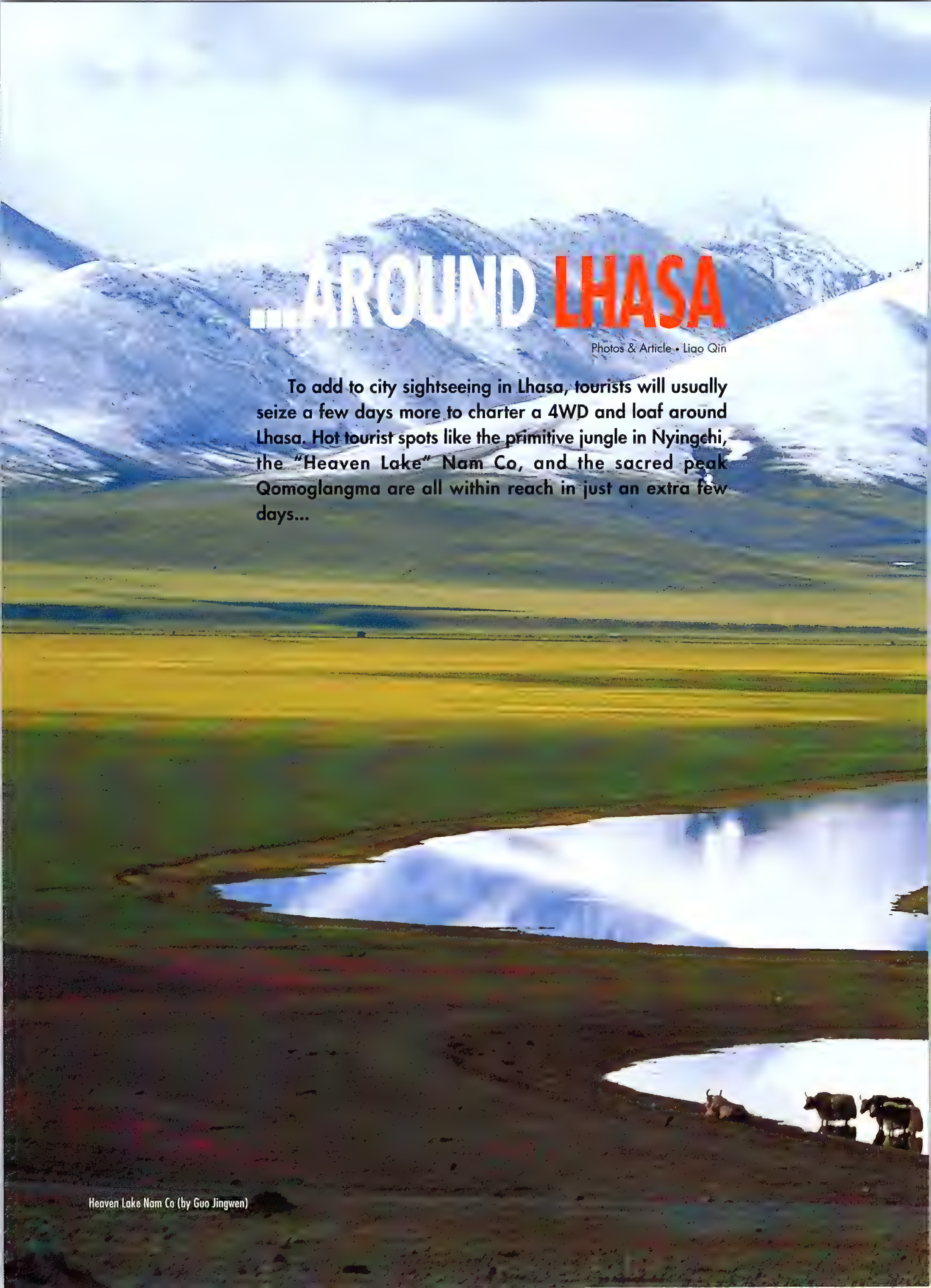
Respect for the Spiritual

I stayed in Lhasa for more than two weeks. When I had free time, I liked to sit in a teahouse or café. One day as I was sipping tea on the balcony of the Majiami Café, I met Li Xin from Beijing. He was savouring his butter tea and seemed to be deep in thought while watching the crowds pass through Barkor Street. It was a wonderful scene. Few city folks get the chance to sit quietly, thinking nothing and doing nothing, free of care. Here you can focus your attention on the people who had crossed mountains and waters and endured all kinds of hardship just to come to the Jokhang Temple to practise their faith.

I got chatting with Li Xin and learned that he is running the Beijing Freemen Car Club Co., Ltd. The club's name alone indicates how much he values freedom. He and a few friends had just spent two weeks riding their motorcycles from Beijing to Lhasa along the Qinghai-Tibet Highway. He lost 10 kilograms of weight on the tough journey. He said he was still overweight, but now he had found the best way to keep in shape. This was his first visit to Tibet, but he decided not to tour the mountains and lakes here as he had in other provinces. At Nam Co, he watched the lake change with the day. It looked much different in the evening when it was cloudy than it had that morning in the sunshine, he said. He believed spirits must be at work there. By contrast, he considered humans to be insignificant. The way they struggle for fame and profit makes their lives meaningless, he observed. He admired the pure beliefs of the Tibetan people. In his view, they live a much richer spiritual life than people in cities, however materially backward Tibet may still be. With such steady determination, Li Xin said, the Tibetans will be able to make many impossible things possible.

Translated by Gloria Shang

1. Crowds on Barkor Street.
2. Lanzhou native Yang An's ethnic garment shop.
3. Feiquan (left) and He Jian (right) run a youth hostel in Lhasa.
4. Li Xin, a tourist from Beijing, admires the Tibetans' earnest religious beliefs.



...AROUND LHASA

Photos & Article • Liao Qin

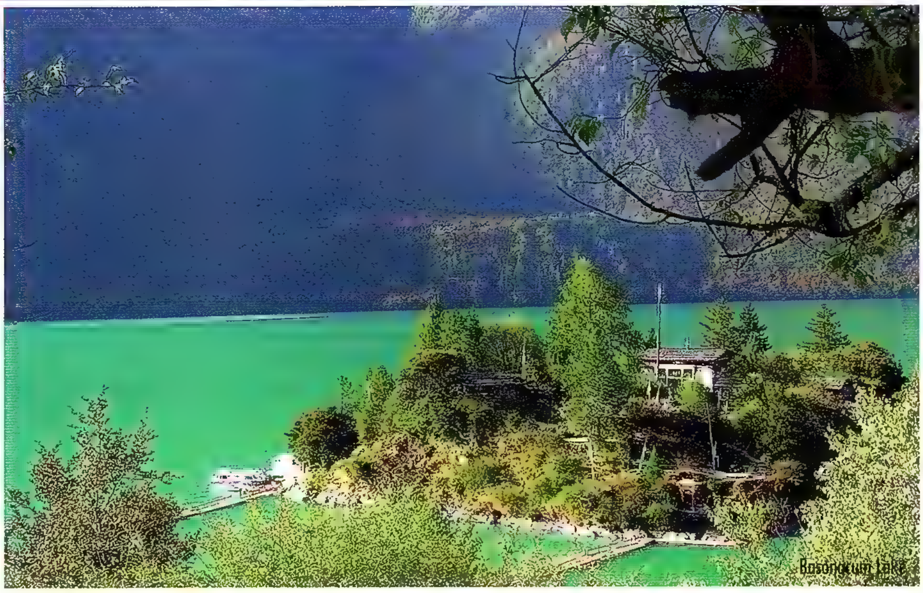
To add to city sightseeing in Lhasa, tourists will usually seize a few days more to charter a 4WD and loaf around Lhasa. Hot tourist spots like the primitive jungle in Nyingchi, the "Heaven Lake" Nam Co, and the sacred peak Qomoglangma are all within reach in just an extra few days...

Heaven Lake Nam Co (by Guo Jingwen)

Going East

South China on the Highland

Route: Lhasa → Bayi Town → Lulang → Lamalin Monastery → Lhasa


Basongcum Lake

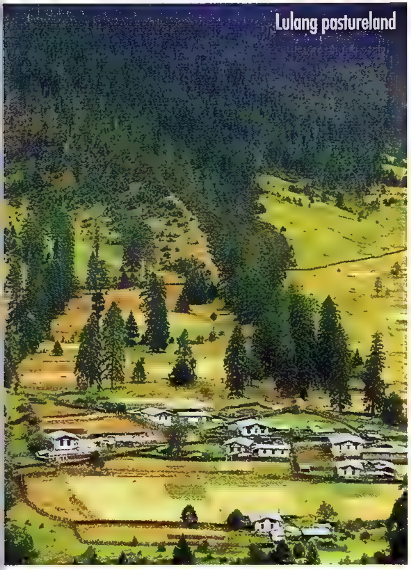
Situated in the lower reaches of the Yarlung Zangbo River in southeastern Tibet, Nyingchi is about 3,000 metres above sea level on average, with the lowest point at only 900 metres above sea level. The climate is moist. The landscape is replete with plants and wildlife.

Time: 2 to 3 days. The whole trip covers 1,000 km. The road from Lhasa to Nyingchi is good.

Transport: You can join a package tour group, or rent a car in day or kilometre payment terms. The transport fee per person is about 800 yuan.

Best season: The period from March to October is usually the "Golden Time" of travelling. In March and April, it is the annual peach festival in Nyingchi. Wild peach trees vie and blossom all over the area. Taohuagou, or Peach Guilly, is well-known for the large groves of wild peach trees. In July and August the mountains take on the dark green summer suit, girdled with mists and clouds. In September and October, there are blue sky, white clouds and the assorted green, yellow and red leaves.

Giant rock on Niyang River


Lulang pastureland

Summary: The trip starts from Lhasa and passes by Maizhokunggar County, where the road climbs over the 5,000-metre Mila Pass. As the temperature at the pass is low, snow falls often. On the decent, the road follows the Niyang River, green mountains perching on both sides. The forests are luxuriant. The air is moist and oxygen-saturated.

Itinerary:

Day 1: It is best to leave Lhasa in early morning, and stop at a town to have lunch. Don't hesitate to try out a variety of mushrooms collected in the mountains. Other local delicacies include the scaleless fish from the Niyang River and Tibetan scented pig.

On the way you can stop by the newly developed sites like Giant Stones in the Niyang River and the Thousand-year Castle off Bahe Town. The must-see sites are the picturesque Basongcum Lake and Jiaxingou Waterfalls. Located at 4,000 metres above sea level in Xoka District of Gongbo'gyamda County, Basongcum Lake is a famous sacred lake of the Red Sect (Nyingmapa).

You will arrive at Bayi Town of Nyingchi at dusk. Bayi Town, nestled in the mountains at less than 3,000 metres above sea level, is one of the few modern cities in Tibet.

Day 2: The first stop today is Lulang, where you will see the "Sea of Forests", the top priority on today's itinerary. On the way there you may visit the King Cypress of the World. You will also climb over Sejila Mountain at nearly 5,000 metres above sea level. In summer and autumn, you will find yourself run into a wonderland of weirdly beautiful plants on both sides. Snow tops the mountains. Over the pass, the Sea of Forests of Lulang will come into sight. It is a massive expanse formed with ranges and ranges of mountains, revealing different shapes of colours. Snow mountains are often conceptualized as cold and life-threatening. Here they nurture instead a safe haven for flourishing plants and wildlife. A sightseeing deck was built for safe and convenient picture taking, but it charges 10 yuan per person. On sunny days you can see Namjagbarwa Peak in the far distance, a sky-piercing snow mountain of over 7,000 metres above sea level.

Tibetan lady

Day 3: If you are not in a hurry to go back to Lhasa, you can put up with the night in Bayi Town on day two. Today you can visit Lamalin Monastery, about 40 km away from town. It belongs to the Nyingmapa school, with the characteristic of phallic worship. In the front of the monastery is male genitals over 1 metre high, formed vividly by stacking wood, black yak wool, and pouches of qingke barley. It is a common practice in the Nyingchi region. This symbol is hung on the eaves of the newly-built houses of the locals.

Going South

Birthplace of Tibetan Culture

Route: Lhasa → Samye Monastery → Zetang → Lhasa

Located in the southern Tibet at about 3,700 metres above sea level, Shannan region is the birthplace of Tibetan culture. It boasts of the first palace, the first monastery and the first patch of farming field of Tibet.

Samye Monastery

Time: One day is enough. The round trip covers about 450 km. Starting off in the morning, you can visit Samye Monastery, Yumbulakang, and Chamzhu Temple. At about 7 p.m., you can return to Lhasa.

Transport: You may join a package tour, rent a car or simply take a taxi for a one-day trip. You can also take the bus to Samye Monastery. It leaves at 6:30 a.m. each morning from the Jokhang Temple square. There are three runs of buses a day. The round trip fare is 80 yuan.

Best season: You can go there year round. The Yalung Cultural Festival will be held here on July 25 to 27. It is the best chance for tourists to experience the ethnic culture and customs.

Summary: This route is relatively short in terms of travel distance. The altitude along the route is comparatively low. The road surface is flat and good.

Itinerary: Samye Monastery is the first Buddhist temple in Tibet that combines the Three Treasures of Buddhism - Buddha, Dharma, and Sangha. It was built in 779 under the joint efforts of Padmasambhava, or Guru Rinpoche, who seeded Buddhism in Tibet, and Tibetan King Trisung Datsan. The layout of the monastery is in the shape of a mandala, a Buddhist symbol that signifies the cosmos. The monastery is of three storeys in a unique way. The ground storey of the Grand Hall adopts the Tibetan architectural style; the middle storey; Han style; the upper storey, Indian style. The murals and statues on different storeys are harmonious with their respective storey styles. The fusion of the Tibetan, Han and Indian architectural styles is unusual in the history of architecture.

Horse Racing Festival

On the wall to the left of the prayer wheels are all covered with murals. The content of the murals is diverse, and the painting skills are masterful. Age has taken its toll on them with damage and fade-out. The charm is yet still there. Lots of tourists pay visits to the monastery solely for them. A Buddhist stupa sits at each corner of the monastery, in white, red, green, and black. On each layer of the stupas Buddhist statues are worshipped. Last year, the Tibetan autonomous government finished the base construction of the 47-km highway from Zetang Town of Shannan to the monastery. It is not tar-paved yet. When the road surface is done, going to Samye Monastery will take just a snap.

If you take a tourist coach in Samye Monastery, it usually leaves at 2:30 p.m. for Yumbulakang and Chamzhu Temple.

Chamzhu Temple, built in the 7th century, is said to be the residence frequented by Tibetan King Songsan Gambo and Tang Princess Wencheng. In the temple a valuable tangka made of pearls and precious stones is kept. It is a rare piece of art. As the temple is small, it won't be long to walk around. Yumbulakang is not far from Chamzhu Temple. On the way there, there will be an uphill climb, but the altitude does not ascend much. It won't be tiring to get there.

Yumbulakang is located on Mt Zhaxiciri about five kilometres away from the Nedong County seat of Shannan in the southeast. Yumbulakang means "doe" in Tibetan as the mountaintop of Mt Zhaxiciri resembles a doe. Built in the 2nd century B.C., it was the royal palace of the first Tibetan King Nitri Tsampo. Standing on the towering palace, you can see the first farming field in Tibet. In summer and autumn it commands a spectacular view there.

Going West

Qomolangma—Dream No more

Route: Lhasa → Xigaze → Lhaze → Tingri → Base Camp of Qomolangma → Xigaze → Gyangze → Yamzho Yumco Lake → Lhasa

Mt Qomolangma in Tibetan regarded as "The Third Sacred Girl", is the highest mountain in the world. Reaching the point of 8,848 metres above sea level, it cuts a huge pyramid shape, with colossal glaciers. The longest one sprawls for 26 km. To have a look of the mountain is the dream of every Tibet traveller.

Time: 3 to 5 days.

Transport: Joining a package tour is an effortless option to go to Qomolangma. Alternatively, you may go to the medium and small hotels or hostels, the hang-outs of backpackers, to post a note. When you count enough heads, you rent a 4WD.No public bus is bound directly for the Base Camp of Qomolangma.

Best season: Most tourists go to Qomolangma from May to September as it is the best time of the year to see or climb the peak.

Summary: In the past two years the China-Nepal Highway was under full renovation. At the end of this year the section from Lhasa to Qomolangma will be completed. As the section from Xigaze to Tingri is now undertaking tar paving, the two-way traffic has to go one way in a day-and-afternoon rotation. The town-to-town distances on this route are: Lhasa-Xigaze, 260 km; Xigaze to Tingri, 240 km; Tingri-Everest, 120 km. It takes two days to go from Lhasa to the Base Camp. Next year, when the highway will be fully completed, it takes only one day to reach the Base Camp with a good vehicle.

Itinerary:

Day 1: Considering this stage of the road construction, you have to call it a day and pass the night in Lhaze. The county seat of Lhaze is not large. There are medium and small hotels and family hostels Tibetan style. Surrounding the town is large patches of farming fields. The local resident houses are Tibetan style too. At a place about 20 km away from Lhaze a road branches off to Sakya Monastery on the slopes of Benbo Mountain within the administration of Xigaze. It has two parts, South Monastery and North Monastery, each on one side of the Zhongqu River.

Ruins of Gyantze Zongshan

Day 2: In between Gyantze and the Base Camp is a 5,000-metre mountain - Jiacuola Mountain. In this section of the trip you can hardly see any trees. The climate is relatively dry. Tingri is the gateway to Qomolangma. Tingri, with the syllable "ri" meaning "mountain" in Tibetan, nestles in a river valley in the Himalaya.

On a sunny day, the 8,848-metre Qomolangma Peak will unveil herself before you. Those who have physically adapted to the altitude can stay overnight. Lodging is available at the Qomolangma Administration Office. Don't expect too much there. Or you can stay in the tents in the Base Camp at 40 yuan per person, which is far less expensive than Rongbuk Hotel. There is still a 10 km short trip from Rongbuk Monastery to the Base Camp. You can take a horse carriage at 60 yuan per person. Or, you may take the challenge to track to there.

Qomolangma Peak

Day 3: On the trip back it is best to put up with the night in Xigaze, where there is a highland ancient city of a history of over 5,000 years. At 3,800 metres above sea level, Xigaze covers a total area of 18.2 square kilometres, with 18 counties under its administration and a population of 635,200 people. At the end of September and the beginning of October each year the Mt. Everest Cultural Festival will be held here. The agenda of the festival includes trade negotiation, religious performance, Tibetan opera, Tsang costume show, and many more. Another annual festival worth noting is the Shoton Festival, in which the huge Buddha tangka will be spread and exposed to the sun on the mountain slope. The festival attracts many hilarious and pious believers.

The must-go site in Xigaze is Zhashenlunbu Temple. Built in 1447 with a construction area of 300,000 square metres, it is one of the "Top Six" monasteries of the Yellow Sect, or Gelukpa, and the abode of all generations of the Panchen Lamas. It is best to visit the monastery in the early morning as it is closed early in the afternoon and it takes time to cover such a site of sprawling establishments.

Day 4: Xigaze is 90 km away from Gyantze. The linking road of them is good. In July and August, the shining gold rape flowers in the fields dominate the sight along your way to Gyantze. The road will pass through quite some villages. Please slow down for scenery and safety! In particular, in the period from the 10th day to the 27th day in the fourth month in the Tibetan calendar, it is the Gyantze Dama (Horse Racing and Archery) Festival. It was initially a festival to consecrate the Gyantze Prince Dharma Gungsang Raodainpo of the Sakya regime five hundred years ago. Now it is all about horse racing and archery, Tibetan opera, dancing and singing, and trading.

Day 5: On the way from Gyantze to Lhasa you will pass by Kanuo Glacier and Yamzho Yumco Lake, where the Chinese movie Red River Valley was shot. Currently the road from Gyantze to Nagarze is under renovation. It is a headache to go through it, and at times, it is simply cut off. If you plan to go this route, it is better to ask about it before you steer to that direction. The section from Nagarze County to Lhasa is all tar-paved, but you still have to climb over mountain passes. All in all, the lucidity of the Yanmdrok Lake can certainly wash off the fatigue on the road, and the Mt. Everest experience will become forever part of your heart-treasured memories.

Going North

Nam Co—Heaven Lake

Route: Lhasa → Yangbajain → Damxung → Nam Co

Located at the foot of Nyainqêntanglha Mountains, Nam Co is the largest lake in Tibet and the highest saltwater lake in the world. With an average altitude of 4,718 metres above sea level and a total area of 1,920 sq km, it suits its name "Nam Co", meaning "Heaven Lake" in Tibetan.

Lover's Rock on Zhaxi Island

Time: 1 to 2 days.

Transport: The round-trip distance from Lhasa to Nam Co is 482 km. Plus a short spin-off from the main route to Yangbajain for a spa bath, the whole trip is about 500 km. The traffic situation on this route is usually good, and the road surface is all tar-paved. The transport tool is automobile. Now bus bound for the lake is not available yet. You can go there in a number of ways. Individual tourists can go to the individual tourist centres to form a temporary group. The fare varies with different seasons and vehicle models. The seat prices for mini-bus and bus are even cheaper. In the medium and small hotels and hostels around Barkor Road, a lot of solo players will post their car-sharing messages on the hotel bulletin. The automobiles are rented by day or kilometre. In summer, a five-seater for a one-day trip to Nam Co costs about 2,000 yuan. Or if you like to pay by kilometre, it costs about 5 yuan per kilometre.

Best season: At the beginning of August each year the annual horse racing festival will be held Damxung Grassland. If you are in Tibet around that time, don't miss it. As Nam Co is at a high altitude, you will have a higher chance of mountain sickness in winter. Besides, winter is chilly there.

Summary: There is no need to remind yourself along this route that the scenery is on the way, not at the destination. It is for sure that you will be excited with the scenery outside, cry out repeatedly for a halt, and shoot the camera like crazy. Hey, don't run! Fast movement on the highland, especially at the pass of Nyainqentanglha Mountains of 5,190 metres above sea level, will make your body unfit. At the pass, you can view Nam Co in the distance. Rain storm strikes quick and often at the pass. Sometimes it hits with snowflakes and hailstones in summer.

Itinerary: Before the departure, you need to buy supplies, like mineral water, fruit, and snacks, in the supermarket. You can get them on the way in the small shops, but the variety and prices are not comparable. Dining is not a problem. There are small restaurants in Damxung, Zhaxi Island of Nam Co (the main sightseeing spot), and Yangbajain hot spring resort. They serve Chinese food.

If you come at the beginning of August, you won't miss the annual horse racing festival on the Damxung Grassland on the way to Nam Co. The nomads in festive costume and the trotting horses will greet you upon arrival. The beautiful tents stud on the grassland. If you are lucky, the hospitable nomads would sing a song in the sky-piercing high pitch typical of highland singers. They would invite you to their tent, and serve boiling hot butter tea and home-made yogurt.

Shortly after leaving Damxung Grassland, it is the Nam Co toll booth. The entry fee is 80 yuan. The staff there will give you a garbage bag.

Going on the grassland of Nam Co, you can see herds of cattle and sheep feeding on the flowery pasture. Sometimes you can see tents with the national flag. They are the floating tent school for nomad kids living on the lakeside pastures. The kids may need your help. Or they may just watch and smile. Due to the influx of tourists, the economic awareness of the local nomads is revived. You will meet nomads on the roadside inviting you to take pictures on their yaks or horses. The price so far is 5 yuan. At the beginning of July this year, environment-friendly sightseeing car service is available 10 km away from Zhaxi Island. The round-trip fare is 20 yuan. There are tent hotels on Zhaxi Island. You can choose to stay overnight there to fine tune yourself slowly slowly to the natural charms of the Heaven Lake. Again if you are lucky, you may see double rainbows, summertime snow... just name a few eye-openers for you city people.

On the way back to Lhasa, you will pass by Yangbajain. A soak in the geothermal spring is highly recommended. You may choose the outdoor swimming pool at 40 to 60 yuan, or the deluxe exclusive spa.

Tips: This route goes mostly along high altitudes. The weather is changeable, and the temperature is lower than that of Lhasa. It is wise to bring warm clothes before departure. And sun cream, cap and sunglasses are the last things to forget.

Translated by Zhang Boli

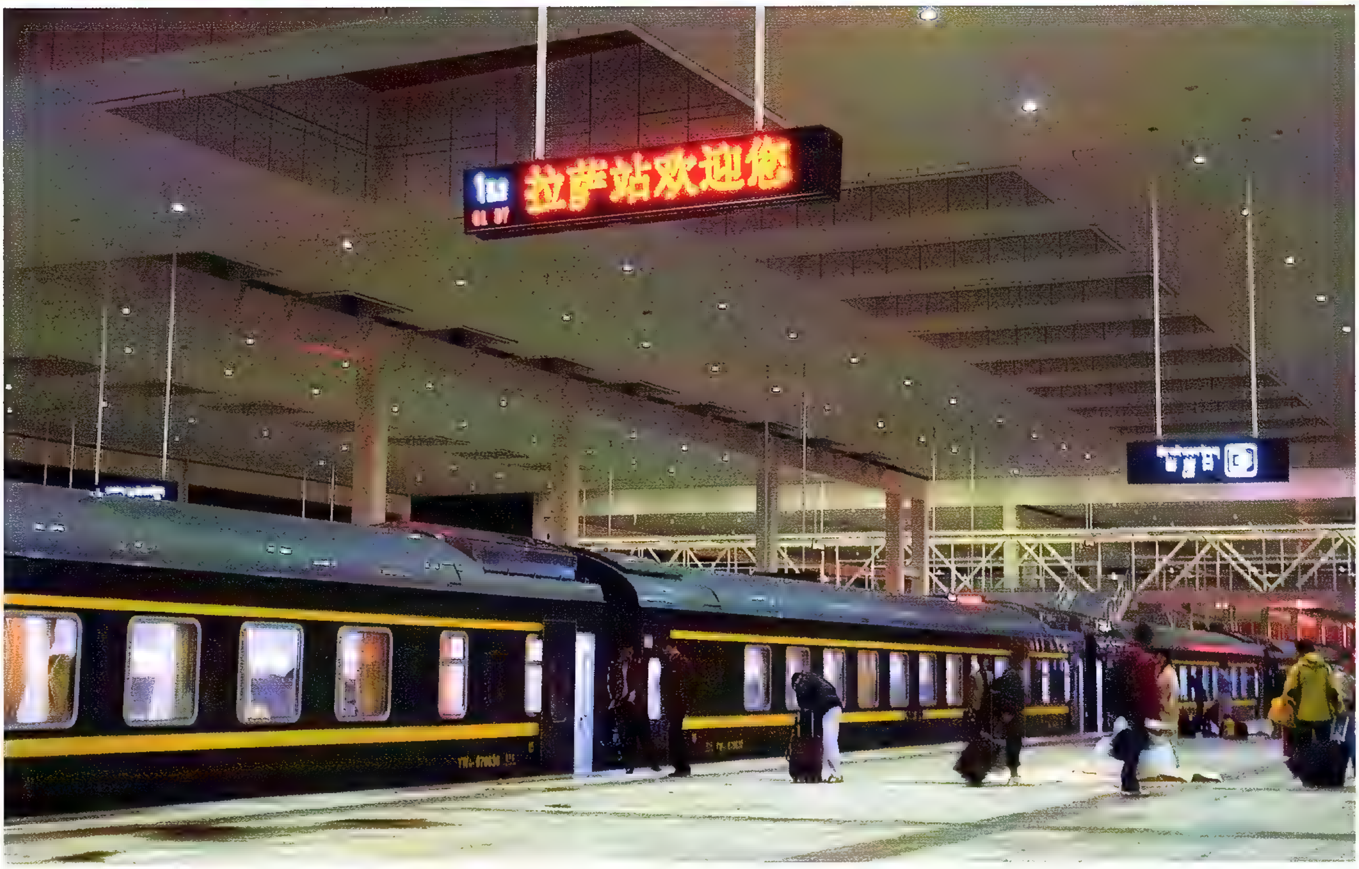
At Nam Co Lake

Local Tibetan hotel

Tibetan dance in Damxung

Travel Tips for the Qinghai-Tibet Railway

Photos & Text • Tanggula



With the opening of a new railway line to Lhasa, bringing affordable travel to the far-off capital of Tibet, tourist numbers have soared. In July, practically all hotels in Lhasa were fully booked and room prices increased 50~100%. It is expected the current boom in tourism in Lhasa will continue until the Chinese national holidays beginning on October 1.

Getting to Tibet

■ By Rail:

Unless you are an addict of long distance train journeys, we suggest you board the train to Lhasa at Lanzhou or Xining, shortening your journey through the rest of China by two or three days. The stretch between Lanzhou/ Xining and Lhasa is the most spectacular and arduous, so it is important you are in a fresh and excited mood to truly appreciate it.

Tickets for the train to Lhasa can be booked through many travel agents in Lanzhou or Xining for a nominal service charge. To save further trouble, travel agents in Hong Kong also offer a booking service. Given the unreliable state of buying tickets from the railway station in Lanzhou or Xining, booking through a travel agent is the most secure way.

Lanzhou Railway International Travel Service
Add: East of the Lanzhou railway station passenger exit (in front of the New Century Hotel)
Tel: (931) 499 1285 Fax: (931) 499 2190
Contact person: Mr. Li Haifeng Mobile: 13321205048

Qinghai Branch of China International Travel Service
Add: 156 Huanghe Lu, Xining
Tel: (971) 824 4074 Fax: (971) 824 4073

Trains: There are three main lines serving Lhasa:

1) Express service from Beijing West Railway Station to Lhasa; 2) Express service from Chengdu (and Chongqing) to Lhasa; 3) Fast service from Xining (and Lanzhou) to Lhasa

1) Train T27/8 from Beijing West Railway Station to Lhasa travels via the Beijing-Guangzhou, Lanzhou to Shanghai, Lanzhou to Qinghai and Qinghai to Tibet trunk lines. The journey has passenger service to Shijiazhuang, Xi'an, Lanzhou, Xining, Golmud and Nagqu.

— T27 departs Beijing West Railway Station at 21:30 and arrives in Lhasa at 20:58 two days later. The entire journey takes 47 hours and 28 minutes.

— T28 departs Lhasa at 08:00 and arrives at Beijing West Railways Station at 08:00 two days later. The entire journey is 48 hours.

* The train between Beijing and Lhasa covers 4,064 km and tickets cost Y389 for hard seat class, 813 yuan for a hard sleeper berth and 1,262 yuan for a soft sleeper berth.

2a) Trains T22/3 and T24/1 run between Chengdu and Lhasa passing through the Chengdu to Baoji, Lanzhou to Shanghai, Lanzhou to Qinghai and Qinghai to Tibet trunk lines. There is service on alternate days. The train serves Baoji, Lanzhou, Xining, Golmud and Nagqu.

— T22/3 departs Chengdu at 18:18 and arrives in Lhasa two days later at 18:28. The journey takes 48 hours and 10 minutes.

— T24/1 departs Lhasa at 09:05 and arrives two days later in Chenngdu at 09:55. The entire journey takes 48 hours and 50 minutes.

* The train between Chengdu and Lhasa covers 3,360 km and tickets cost 331 yuan for hard seat class, 712 yuan for a hard sleeper berth and 1,104 yuan for a soft sleeper berth.

2b) Trains T222/3 and T224/1 provide service between Chongqing and Lhasa passing through the Chongqing to Xiangfan, Xi'an to Ankang, Lanzhou to Shanghai, Lanzhou to Qinghai and Qinghai to Tibet trunk lines. There is service on alternate days. The trains pass through Guang'an, Dazhou, Xi'an, Baoji, Lanzhou, Xining, Golmud and Nagqu.

— T222/3 departs Chongqing at 19:20 and arrives in Lhasa at 18:28 two days later. The entire journey takes 47 hours and 8 minutes.

— T224/1 departs Lhasa at 09:05 and arrives in Chongqing at 09:55 two days later. The entire journey takes 48 hours and 50 minutes.

* The train between Chongqing and Lhasa covers 3,654 km and ticket cost 355 yuan for hard seat class, 754 yuan for a hard sleeper berth and 1,168 yuan for a soft sleeper berth.

3a) Train K917/8 provides service between Lanzhou and Lhasa serving the Lanzhou to Qinghai and Qinghai to Tibet trunk lines. There is service on alternate days. The route passes through Xining, Ha'ergai, Ke Ke, Delingha, Golmud, Tuotuo River, Anduo, Nagqu and Dangxiong with passenger service to each.

— K917 departs Lanzhou at 16:45 and arrives in Lhasa at 22:30 the next day. The journey takes 29 hours and 45 minutes.

— K918 departs Lhasa at 09:32 and arrives in Lanzhou at 15:45 the next day. The journey takes 30 hours and 13 minutes.

* The train service between Lanzhou to Lhasa covers 2,188 km and tickets cost 242 yuan for hard seat class, 552 yuan for a hard sleeper berth and 854 yuan for a soft sleeper berth.

3b) Train N917/8 runs between Xining and Lhasa along the Qinghai-Tibet trunk line. There is service on alternate days. The journey offers passenger service to Ha'ergai, Ke Ke, Delingha, Golmud, Tuotuo River, Amdo, Nagqu and Dangxiong.

— The train K917 departs from Xining at 20:07 and arrive in Lhasa at 22:30 on the next evening. Total time is 26 hours 23 minutes.

— The train K918 departs from Lhasa at 09:32 and arrive in Xining at 12:19 on the next day. Total time is 26 hours 47 minutes.

* The rail journey between Xining and Lhasa covers 1,972 km and costs 266 yuan for hard seat tickets, 523 yuan for a hard sleeper berth and 810 yuan for a soft sleeper berth.

On the Train:

- When you buy your ticket you will be given a booklet entitled Tips for Travelling on the High Plateau and a "Passenger Health Registration Card" to fill in and give to the train conductor.
- Consult a doctor before beginning your journey, particularly in the case of sufferers from high blood pressure, heart disease, diabetes and other long-term illnesses. Upon arrival in Lanzhou or Xining, purchase some medicine to guard against oxygen depletion such as "Hong Jing Tian" (紅景天) or "Gao Yuan An" (高原安). Take such medicine before you begin your rail journey into Tibet as taking the medicine only once symptoms develop will be less effective. In addition, read the booklet distributed by the conductor after Golmud entitled Instructions on Taking the Qinghai-Tibet Railway.
- A restaurant car on board serves simple dishes for around 20~30 yuan; dining times will be announced on the train broadcasting system. Alternatively, meal boxes are available from the trolley for 15 yuan. Breakfast comprising Chinese congee, bread bun and pickled vegetables costs 10 yuan per serving. The standard is not bad. Tea and coffee is served after lunch and dinner for around 10 yuan for a steaming cup of instant coffee. A stop in the restaurant car makes a nice break from the boredom in your carriage. Snacks and instant noodles are also available at nominal prices, however it is advised you bring your own fruit.

By Air:

- There are direct air services from Hong Kong to Beijing, Chengdu and Chongqing or from Shenzhen to Beijing, Chengdu, Chongqing, Lanzhou and Xining from which you can change to the rail service to Tibet.
- There are direct flights to Lhasa from Guangzhou, Chengdu, Chongqing, Shanghai, Beijing, Xi'an, Xining and Kunming. A single-trip flight ticket costs around 2,000 yuan.

Ground Transportation

Lanzhou and Xining

Taxis are cheap and plentiful. Flag fall starts at 6~7 yuan; for this amount you should be able to get to most places without extra cost. Farther journeys to the city outskirts cost more.

Lhasa

Public buses: 1 yuan per person, often overcrowded, not recommended.

Mini buses: 2 yuan, often stops by the side of the road to wait for customers, also not recommended.

Tricycle: 3 yuan flag fall should get you to most places downtown. Prices increase for distances greater than 2 km, usually to about 5 yuan.

Tips: Locals know the price should be 3 yuan, thus if you ask the price you will be roundly quoted a higher price. It seems this is more common than you might think, so watch out!

Taxi: Without the meter running, most places can be reached for the flat fare of 10 yuan, even as far north as the Sera Monastery. Prices increase as you go out, for example a taxi to the railway station will cost 30 yuan. Most taxi drivers are honest. Only once did I come across a blatant case of fleecing, when I was quoted 15 yuan to go to the performance hall on Niang Re North Rd. The next taxi I got only cost 10 yuan!

Airport Shuttle: The airport is 65 km from downtown and the journey takes about 1 hour. Taxi fares begin from 120 yuan. Airport shuttles run from 14 Kan Ang Dong Rd beside the Potala Palace and cost 25 yuan one way. The airport shuttles run every half hour between 7~9 a.m., every hour between 9 a.m. and 2 p.m. and a final service at 5 p.m. Be sure to check when your flight departs to avoid missing the few numbers of buses in the afternoon!

Accommodation

Lanzhou

1. New Century Hotel
   Add: 109-1 Huoche East Rd
   Tel: (931) 861 5888 Fax: (931) 861 9133
   Rates: Around 160 yuan for a standard room
   Features: Extremely close to railway station entrance, 3-star facilities up to scratch.
2. Lanzhou Hotel
   Add: 486 Dong Gang West Rd
   Tel: (931) 841 6321 Fax: (931) 841 8608
   Rates: Around 398 yuan for a standard room in the main building, 230 yuan in the east or west wings.
   Features: An old style hotel, the interior has been redecorated to 4-star standard in the main building and 3-star standard in the east and west wings. Located about 2 km from railway station on direct road making it easy to reach station and downtown destinations.
3. Chang Si Garden Hotel
   Add: 496 Nanchang Rd (facing Wei Yuan Rd)
   Tel: (931) 826 0963, 826 1961
   Fax: (931) 826 7049
   Rates: 100 yuan for a standard room
   Features: A hotel attached to the Chinese Academy of Science, small and quiet. A bit old-fashioned but reasonable prices suited to budget travel. A bit difficult to find, the entrance is on the east side of Wei Yuan Rd.

Xining

1. Qinghai Hotel
   Add: 158 Huang He Rd
   Tel: (971) 614 4888 Fax: (971) 614 4145
   Rates: From 240 yuan for a standard room
   Features: Located in city centre, 4-star and newly renovated.
2. Qinghai Hue De Hotel
   Add: Qi Lian Rd
   Tel: (971) 812 6018 Fax: (971) 812 1898
   Rates: 210 yuan for a standard room
   Features: A 3-star hotel close to railway station.

Lhasa

Lhasa can be divided into the old and new parts of town. The old part of town lies around the Potala Palace and retains the traditional Tibetan feel in particular in the areas around Jokhang Temple and Barkor Street. Shops and restaurants are plentiful here. Most hotels are located in the new part of the city which is indistinguishable from any other modern Chinese city in the east. Note that the room prices quoted below are quoted for the peak season in July. In the winter season hotel prices drop about 50%.

1. Phuntsok Khasang International Youth Hostel
   Add: 48 Duosenge North Rd (Qing Nian Rd)
   Tel: (891) 691 5222
   Website: http://spaces.msn.com/tibet-hotel
   Rates: Double room for 160 yuan, triple for 180 yuan, 4-person room for 40 yuan per bed, 6-person room for 30 yuan per bed, 8-person room for 30 yuan per bed. All rooms have bathrooms.
   Features: Opened in May 2006 by several young Beijing partners well acquainted with the needs of weary backpackers. Very clean and cheap especially for solo travellers. Rooms on the east side look over a private garden belonging to the local newspaper group, quiet and a delight to look over. Also a wonder for travellers - free washing! A good supermarket is right outside, though it is a bit of a walk to the nearest restaurants.
2. Kyichu Hotel Lhasa
   Add: 18 Beijing East Rd
   Tel: (891) 633 1344 Fax: (891) 632 0234
   Website: www.kyichuhotel.com
   Rates: Between 260 yuan and 320 yuan for a standard room
   Features: 2-star hotel in convenient location only 8 minutes walk to Jokhang Temple. Decorated in Tibetan style, rooms quite big. Rooms overlooking street can be a little noisy, rooms in the centre overlook blank walls. The best rooms are located at the back overlooking a garden; an oasis of quiet in the busy city.
3. Snow Land Hotel
   Add: 4 Tibetan Hospital Rd
   Tel: (891) 632 3687 Fax: (891) 632 7145
   Rates: Dormitory 25 ~ 35 yuan per person, standard rooms 80 ~ 360 yuan
   Features: Right next to Jokhang Temple, surrounded by souvenir stalls, restaurants and outdoor equipment shops. Well known among backpackers, however a bit worn down and facing demolition on opposite side. Not the best environment for a quiet stay.
4. Xiangbala Hotel
   Add: 1 Dan Jie Lin Rd

Norbulingka (Summer Palace)

Tel: (891) 632 3888 Fax: (891) 632 3577

Rates: Standard room for 460 yuan

Features: Located opposite Snowland Hotel, 3-star and good facilities. A little pricey, rates can drop by half in wintertime.

5. Mandala Hotel

Add: 31 South Barkor Street

Tel: (891) 633 8940 Fax: (891) 632 4787

Rates: 230 ~ 268 yuan for a standard room

Features: Located next to Jokhang Temple and the must-see Barkor Street. A good spot if you are entranced by the lively Barkor Street scenery.

6. Daxa Guest House

Add: 1 Jidui St, Barkor Street

Tel: (891) 691 2119 Fax: (891) 691 2100

Rates: Standard room for 150 yuan, ordinary room for 100 yuan

Features: Located behind Mandala Hotel, new hotel built in wonderful traditional Tibet style. Only 30 rooms available making it often fully booked.

7. La Bai Hotel

Add: 1 Yu Ta Rd

Tel: (891) 632 2929 Fax: (891) 633 7606

Rates: 240 yuan for standard room

Features: Located next to Lhasa Department Store so convenient for shopping. Potala Palace is a short stroll to the right and another 15 minutes to Jokhang Temple. Rooms quite large.

8. Tibet Postal Service Hotel

Add: 33 Beijing Middle Rd

Tel: (891) 682 1999 Fax: (891) 681 3999

Rates: 380 yuan for a standard room

Features: Close to Potala Palace, newly refurbished, close to shops

9. Airway Hotel

Add: 14 Kang Ang Dou Rd (north section)

Tel: (891) 691 5777 Fax: (891) 691 5619

Rates: 320 yuan for a standard room

Features: A 3-star hotel located outside east gate of Potala Palace, with air ticketing office in lobby and airport shuttle at doorstep.

10. Grand Hotel Tibet

Add: 67 Nan Beijing Middle Rd

Tel: (891) 681 6666 Fax: (891) 682 6088

Website: www.xzds.com.cn

Rates: 380 yuan for a standard room

Features: A 3-star hotel located in west part of new town area, convenient to Norbulingka Summer Palace and Tibet Museum, bit far from old town and Jokhang Temple. Tibet Tangulaha Arts Centre is located behind the hotel.

11. Yak Hotel

Add: 100 Beijing East Rd

Tel: (891) 632 3496

AIRWAY HOTEL

Rates: 25 ~ 50 yuan per bed, standard rooms from 90 yuan
Features: Top choice for backpackers.

12. Banakshol Hotel
Add: 43 Beijing East Rd
Tel: (891) 632 3829
Rates: Bunks from 30 yuan each, standard room 100 yuan
Features: Good place to check travel notices or hire a taxi car for the day.

Must-visits in Lhasa

Potala Palace

The Potala Palace must be one of the most exclusive tourist attractions on Earth. In order to stem against overcrowding, only 2,300 tickets are available each day. Tickets must be registered for in advance every day at 5 p.m. at the ticket office on the western side of the palace. You must register your ID number and date of birth after which you will be given a token stating the allotted time and entrance for you to enter and buy tickets the next day. If you arrive later than what is printed on your token, you will have to repeat the process again. After queuing all day for a ticket you will come to a new sympathy with the masses of pilgrims bowing their heads to the floor all day.

The entrance fee to Potala Palace is 100 yuan but rumours abound that it could increase soon to 300 yuan. Officials say that the price won't be adjusted this year, but much disbelief prevails. The last time I was there on 17 July, I asked the guard how much tickets costs and he said "still 100 yuan."

In peak season it is estimated between 5,000 and 6,000 tourists arrive every day in Lhasa, and yet the Potala Palace only permits 2,300 entrants per day. This means that half of the tourist to Lhasa leave without every visiting the Palace. Make sure you're not one of them!

Tips:

- Once past the ticket office, photography is not permitted in all areas including outside.
- It takes about 2 hours to tour the palace and there are no toilets available for public use inside.
- Please follow the direction of the arrows when entering the different temples.

Jokhang (Da Zhao) Temple

Compared to the Potala Palace, the equally impressive and important Jokhang Temple is much easier to tour. Entry tickets cost 70 yuan and there is no queuing system. Photography is permitted in all areas except inside. There are no explanatory plaques or signs so you will have to come prepared. Don't miss the statue of Sakyamuni Buddha brought here by Princess Wencheng of the Tang Dynasty and the statues of Tibetan king Songstan Gambo and Princess Wencheng.

Tips: Jokhang Temple is surrounded daily by pilgrims touching their heads to the ground in prayer. If you want to take a photo, maintain a discreet distance so as not to obstruct them. If you encounter resistance, accept it and move on.

Sera Monastery

Located north of the city, Sera Monastery is one of the most important monasteries in Tibetan Yellow Sect Buddhism. Due to its distance, crowds here are fewer in number. Scripture debates take place here daily between 3 ~ 5 p.m. (Sundays excepted) and are worth a look to see the lamas arguing and gesticulating wildly. Entrance costs 50 yuan.

Tips:

- There are no signs inside the monastery, however monks are usually happy to answer questions or guide you from temple to temple.
- Photography is permitted inside the monastery for a charge.
- Within the monastery are two golden-eaved halls; the one on the left houses a Buddha statue. Many Tibetan pilgrims poke their head under his back in the belief it will protect them from catastrophe.
- Buses to Sêra are available from the Tibetan hospital close by the Jokhang Temple. The fare is 2 yuan however the service is slow. An alternative is to go there by taxi for 10 yuan.

Norbulingka (Summer Palace)

The Norbulingka Summer Palace of the Dalai Lama is located west of the city. The main attraction here is visiting the new palace erected for the 14th Dalai Lama still kept in the original condition. There are also palace buildings and artifacts made for previous Dalai Lamas such as the transportation carriages used by the 13th Dalai Lama.

Tips:

- The summer palace is quite large and buildings are spread out. Take care not to get lost.
- From the city, a taxi will cost 10 yuan or 8 yuan for a tricycle.

Entertainment

1. Tibet Wind Rong Zhong Er Jia Performing Art Palace
Add: 25 Niang Re North Rd (the place is a bit far, recommend to take a taxi)
Entrance: First performance at 7:30 ~ 9:30 p.m. costs 160 yuan. After 10:30 p.m. entrance is free but consumption inside is expected. The centre closes at around 2 or 3 a.m.
Features: Named after Rongzhong Erjia, a famous Tibetan singer, the centre is strong on traditional Tibetan singing and dancing and a fabulous fashion parade of traditional Tibetan costumes towards the end.

2. Tibet Tangulaha Arts Centre
Add: 67 Beijing Middle Rd (inside Grand Hotel Tibetan)
Entrance: 160 yuan at door or 100 yuan from travel agents. Performances nightly; tickets are valid for all nights.
Features: Worth a look for the grand stage scenes, there are two performances nightly. The 7 p.m. show is recommended as it includes a buffet; make sure to arrive early and eat so that you have free hands for photos during the show.

Other Tips

Text • Shi Baoxiu

Travelling From July 1, 2006 onwards the Qinghai-Tibet Railway is in trial run, with passenger trains from Beijing, Shanghai, Guangzhou, Chengdu, and Xining to Lhasa. In particular, the trains from Beijing and Chengdu to Lhasa will depart for Lhasa every day. The trains from Guangzhou, Shanghai and Xining to Lhasa will depart every other day.

The trains of the Qinghai-Tibet Railway adopt the combination of diffusive oxygen supply and individual oxygen intake to compensate for the oxygen difference on the highland. The fully-enclosed cars are equipped with scrap, wastewater and trash collection facilities to ensure the fragile highland environment will not be damaged. The trains set up special sleeper cars and dining car. The sleeper cars are separated into independent compartments, which are equipped with close-circuit TV, bath-room and toilet. Passengers take only 48 hours from the West Train Station of Beijing to Lhasa. On the return trip, passengers can go by air. There are flights from Lhasa to Beijing, Shanghai, Chengdu, Xi'an, and Xining. Of the flights, the Lhasa-Chengdu flight is the busiest one.

When one just lands on Lhasa, he shall rest so that the body can adapt to the highland. It is recommended to lie down for two to three hours before sightseeing. New comers to Lhasa, especially those with heart diseases or high blood pressure, shall walk slowly. Otherwise, it is likely to cause strokes or mountain sickness that threatens life.

Lhasa has buses and taxis. There are pedal tricycles, but the price is higher than that in other provinces. It is suggested to haggle first. The tricycle runners are mostly Sichuan people.

Eating Upon arrival, one may lose the appetite for food due to mountain sickness. At this moment eating cannot be skipped, but it is best to take some light food. When the body get adapted, it is not wise to overeat as it may increase the workload of the heart. It is good to drink some butter tea of the Tibetan cuisine. It helps the digesting system functioning again. Spirits are the last thing one shall take, because alcohol causes pain and crisis. At an altitude of 3,500 metres or higher, drinks with alcohol, including beer and red wine, shall be banned. It is also wise not to smoke.

Keeping warm Though you depart for Tibet in the hot summer, winter dress shall not be left behind on a trip to the highland. A solid dust coat and a sweater are items to carry onto the road. If you plan to stay on a highland over 4,000 metres above sea level for more than two days, it is best to bring a down coat or a cotton paddy, just in case of sudden change of weather. Catching a cold on the highland may lead to pulmonary edema and hydrocephalus, which are fatal.

Sleeping The accommodation is Lhasa is convenient. There are a number of high-class hotels. But do not apply the star grading for hotels in Hong Kong or coastal metropolitans in China to the hotels in Lhasa. There are many hotels Tibetan style in Lhasa. Try them out — why not? They serve cuisine Tibetan style, with Tibetan dancing and opera. After check-in, it is wise not to take a shower if it is not absolutely necessary. In summer, the evening temperature in Lhasa is on the low side. Taking a shower increases the change of catching a cold. The consequence of a cold can be very serious.

Medical care On the highland you need to bring a variety of medicine for oxygen deficiency, flu, and digestion problem. The best drug for oxygen deficiency is rhodiola rosea (the golden root or arctic root) produced by Chinese manufactures. It is a nonprescription drug available in most of the drug stores. For cardiovascular and diabetes patients, it is necessary to gain the suggestions of the doctor before they go to the highland. It is also suggested to bring healing or preventive medicine for skin burns by strong UV and lip chapping.

1. The passenger trains halts at Lhasa Train Station. (by Li Tong)

2. The dining car of a train on the Qinghai-Tibet railway has a nice decor. (by Li Tong)

3. You need to use this oxygen bag when you feel hard to breathe. It can be refilled.

4. The "life-saving medicine" to Tibet, Hong Jing Tian (rhodiola rosea).

5. The souvenir stalls in Barkhor Street of Lhasa. (by Qian Han)

红景天
HONG JING TIAN
医用氧气袋
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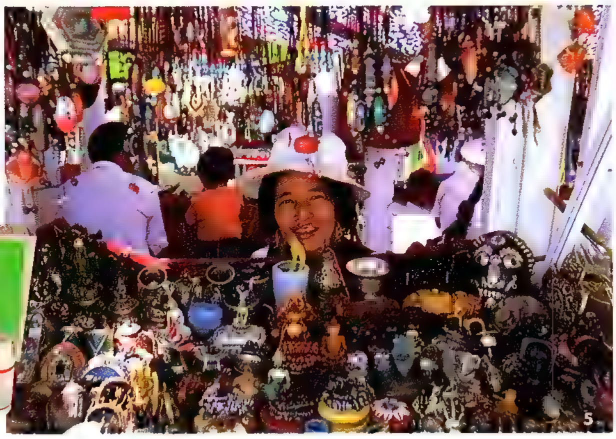

Editors' Note: Two and a half years ago Dr Lee Lok Sze was diagnosed with intestinal cancer. The diligent scientific researcher, who has worked at the North and South Poles and Mount Qomolangma (the "Earth's three poles"), did not stop her pursuits, but continued to promote the importance of environmental protection. Her selflessness and enthusiasm moved her surgeon to operate on her free of charge. She must have also moved the gods to prolong her life so she could carry on her work in the world's polar regions.

She did not reveal the state of her health to the public and the few friends who knew of her illness kept quiet, allowing her to get on with her work and rest as needed. Now willing to talk about the experience, she wants to express her thanks to everyone who helped her through the hardest period in her life. In this article, she shares the bitter but also happy days with us.

1

In January 2004, just as Rebecca Lee was preparing for another South Pole trip, she learnt she had intestinal cancer.

By June 2006 when I met her after a lecture she presented at a school, she was weary and somewhat thinner but still graceful as ever. "I was saved from the jaws of death and it's already two and a half years since the operation. I am extremely grateful to my surgeon, Doctor Wong Kam Kuen, who looked after me and supported me from the very beginning," she said.

Then she calmly spoke of her experiences during those two and a half years.

She was at a conference in Beijing on January 13 when the phone call came. Dr Wong explained that she had intestinal cancer. Though she had mentally prepared for the news, it still seemed so sudden. Despite all the hardships and difficulties she had

Rebecca Lee — Still Me

Article • Wang Ling

2

1. Dr Rebecca Lee has no regrets for what she has done for South Pole research during the past 20 years.

2. Lee is deeply committed to theecological environment of the "three poles". Here at the North Pole, she and her fellow team members travel by dogsled.

3. Lee is inspired by penguins living in the harsh environment of the South Pole.

experienced at the poles and on Mount Qomolangma, she did not know how to face this battle.

From then on Dr Wong became her patron saint. She spoke warmly of his efforts to guide her through the operation and recovery.

Overwhelmed with Pain

Lee was in hospital for seven days for the operation and follow-up treatment, finally leaving on the last day of the lunar calendar year. She endured great pain during that time; whenever she moved it felt as if her intestines were rolling around inside her. Though she obviously needed help, she told no one about her condition. Over the next two years she continued to exercise and climb mountains to improve her physical strength and ate mostly light meals. Sometimes she was busy and tired from social

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1. Inspections in an ice-bound polar region.

2. Lee and her colleagues worked hard to bring the "Xue Long" to Hong Kong. Some 20,000 people visited the ship and learned about China's scientific research at the South Pole.

3. Lee continued her physical training after her operation.

activities and lectures, but she tried hard to maintain her mental equilibrium. She liked to listen to Chinese music, which calmed and cheered her with its gentle melodies. And she always remembered what Dr Wong had said, telling herself, "Since you had the courage to go to the South Pole, why can't you face your illness?" Soon she was quite confident that she could recover.

A Dream Comes First

Lee is always thinking about the South Pole. In August 2004, less than six months after her operation, she went to Shanghai to meet Yuan Shaohong, captain of the "Xue Long" (Snow Dragon), an icebreaker used by China's scientific research teams at the South Pole. When he told her that the ship might sail to Hong Kong, she was thrilled because she had hoped that the "Xue Long" would visit the HKSAR to mark the 20th anniversary of the nation's South Pole exploration. She flew to Beijing in early September to meet Wei Wenliang, Captain Yuan's superior, to ensure that the visit took place. Director Wei confirmed that the "Xue Long" would sail to Hong Kong at the end of October, although funding was a problem.

She immediately promised Wei that she would help raise the money, even though she was still weak and in pain. She didn't hesitate to take charge, just as she had in 1985 when she prepared and designed a Hong Kong exhibition of the China South Pole Inspection Team.

Then she took a deep breath. She was fully aware of the possible consequences of what she was about to do, that it could cost her life. The doctor had advised her to have a good rest and begin chemotherapy, but to realize her dream first she called off the treatments and prepared for the visit of the "Xue Long."

Single-minded, Single-handed

As soon as she returned to Hong Kong, she got to work. Berthing the ship was the first problem. She decided the Ocean Centre Dock at Tsim Sha Tsui on Victoria Harbour would be the best place for the "Xue Long" to anchor as it was convenient for the public to visit. She talked to the people in charge and at last convinced the harbour group leaders to let the ship berth there free of charge. A date was fixed for the "Xue Long"to come to Hong Kong.

Then she informed relevant departments of the Hong Kong government about the visit. She knew it was a good chance to promote the nation's polar inspections and educate the public about their work, much as China's astronauts' visit had done for the country's aerospace accomplishments. No support was forthcoming, however, with the government citing time constraints. So she was left to handle it all by herself. With neither money nor government help, putting the visit together in such a short time suddenly seemed impossible. But she was determined to organize a worthy welcome ceremony for the ship.

In spite of her physical pain, she rushed around seeking financial support. She called on a venerable Hong Kong elder devoted to doing public good. He was having lunch in Sha Tin while she was on the island, but he agreed to meet her 45 minutes later. Because it was difficult to get an appointment with the philanthropist, she immediately started her journey, travelling by subway, train and taxi to get there on time. The gentleman was waiting for her at the gates of the Jockey Club when she arrived. She explained her mission and received a donation of HK$20,000. In this way, she raised funds for the ship's visit.

The government department that turned her down (and that easily could have funded and assisted her) instead stood idly by while a weak woman with a serious illness scrambled around town to pool together enough money for the event. But she was moved by the tremendous support that so many commercial, industrial and other organizations gave her.

"Xue Long" in Hong Kong

On October 24, 2004 the "Xue Long" left Shanghai for the 21st time and headed for the South Pole via Hong Kong with 127 team members aboard. Lee flew to Shanghai especially for the launch and then immediately returned to Hong Kong to arrange the welcome ceremony. She arrived at the dock early on the morning of October 29 for last-minute checks. Soon after, the 167-metre long, 22.6-metre wide "Xue Long", with a displacement volume of 14,998 tons, proudly sailed into Victoria Harbour. Leaders from the State Oceanic Administration, polar region office and relevant departments of the HKSAR administration along with representatives of central government departments stationed in Hong Kong, science and technology leaders, and the members of commerce and industry who had offered their financial support attended the ceremony. In a very short time, Lee had brought them all together and organized a grand honour guard composed of the Hong Kong Girl Guides Association, Scout Association of Hong Kong, the Hong Kong Boys' Brigade and Girls' Brigade, and the Hong Kong Adventure Corps. She cannot recall just how many meetings were held to gather them all for the ceremony.

In the flurry of activity and the media interviews going on all around that day, no one knew that Lee had nearly collapsed from the pain of her illness. But as the bagpipers began playing, she pulled herself up and joined her guests, proud that she was able to bring her knowledge and enthusiasm about the South Pole to the people....

Bureaucratic Bother

The "Xue Long" opened its doors to the citizens of Hong Kong for the three days it was docked there. Photos commemorating 20 years of South Pole inspections were displayed on the ship along with specimens including lichen, rocks, skua (large predatory sea birds), penguins and transport tools such as a helicopter and snowmobiles. Lee invited students and teachers from several hundred schools to visit the ship. They had their pictures taken with the scientists onboard. She also arranged tours of Hong Kong for the scientists, including a visit to the Marine Department of Hong Kong. Altogether about 20,000 visitors toured the ship during those three days.

In that brief time, the "Xue Long" sparked such a South Pole fever that a top HKSAR official who had promised to attend the welcome ceremony but cancelled at the last minute, suddenly decided to visit the boat. It is no easy job to arrange a high-profile person's visit, but when he excused himself from the welcome ceremony, Lee had to reorder the list of officials and guests accordingly and the invitation cards had to be reprinted, creating even more work for her. So his sudden decision to drop by had Lee running in circles again. The official even asked her whether she was a public servant after learning what she had done. Lee did not know whether to laugh or cry. The official probably had no idea that the government departments she had approached had declined to help her or realized what difficulties she had overcome to arrange the ship's visit. Nor was he likely to know how the same departments gave her the cold shoulder for suggesting that a polar region museum be built in Hong Kong.

Finally, at noon on November 1, the icebreaker "Xue Long" sounded its horn and left Hong Kong for its southernmost destination.

The whole endeavour lasted only three days, but Lee had been thoroughly involved from the very beginning, evidence that she would gladly promote the cause of China's scientific research at any cost.

She related an interesting incident. After it was all over, she flopped exhausted into a taxi. The driver recognized her at once, thanked her for what she had done and refused to take her money for the fare. In

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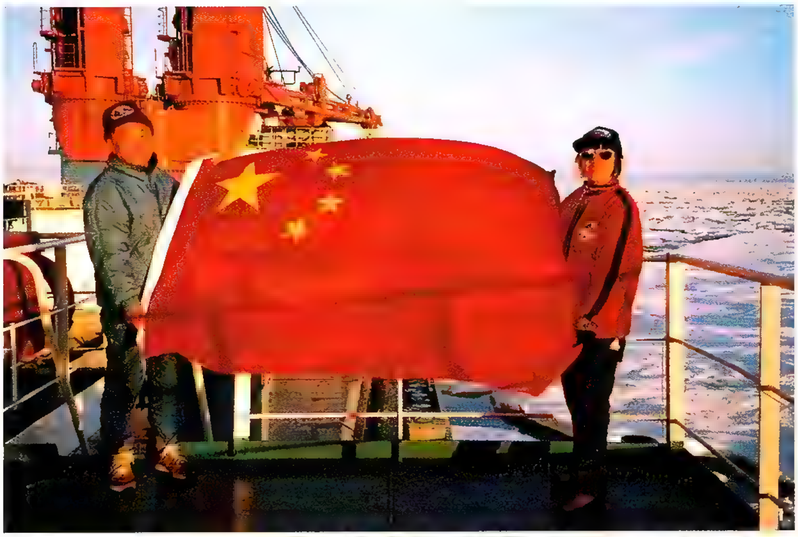


1. Lee was proud to raise the nation's Five-Star Red Flag at the South Pole.

2. Because Lee knows that young people are the future, she has given as many as 30 lectures a month at schools to inspire students with a love of nature and respect for our environment.

3. Her sixth visit to the Great Wall Station at the South Pole evoked many memories for Lee.

addition to the colleagues and friends who had helped her, she was extremely grateful to this man for his kindness.

A Life-long Honour

On January 18, 2005 the twelve members of the nation's polar inspection team ascended Dome-A, the topmost point of the South Pole. The whole country hailed the success. There are actually four "poles" at the South Pole; the United States has ascended to the point of 90 degrees latitude south, Russia to the ice pole, and France to the magnetic pole. The Five-Star Red Flag, the national flag of the People's Republic of China, was finally hoisted atop Dome-A.

Lee tested herself again by going to the South Pole in December 2005. Together with Hong Kong and mainland members of the Chinese South Pole Inspection Team, she met with still more members at the Great Wall Station. It was her sixth trip, and she knew it might be her last. With each step of the journey she was reminded of her experiences over the last two decades. She shook hands with and hugged her old colleagues, their eyes brimming with tears.

Lee was often lost in thought during our interview and reminisced about those 20 years. Coming back to the present, she asked herself whether her South Pole dream would continue. She sighed, realizing that her hopes of establishing a South Pole museum might not be realized for another generation.

But in talking about the next generation, her face lit up. She said that to convince young people to cherish the earth, and to spread what had been learned from the South Pole inspections, she gave about 30 lectures each month to schools and organizations, including overseas groups. For an ordinary, healthy person such a schedule is punishing enough, but here she was suffering from a serious illness. Still, this was her mission and she had already been sharing her knowledge for several years. She said felt a great deal of satisfaction when she saw youngsters listening attentively, eagerly asking questions and obviously interested in what she had to say. Reporters have often told her that they once listened to her lectures as students, which also comforted her. Even so, her hard work does not always receive the attention it deserves. She has often had applications for educational funds turned down and has used her own money to support her objectives. Nearly all of her savings has been used up because she has so little time to collect donations, preferring to spend her time talking to young people. Her friends ask why she puts herself through it all. But her dream is stronger than any obstacle... even cancer.

Translated by Wang Zengfen

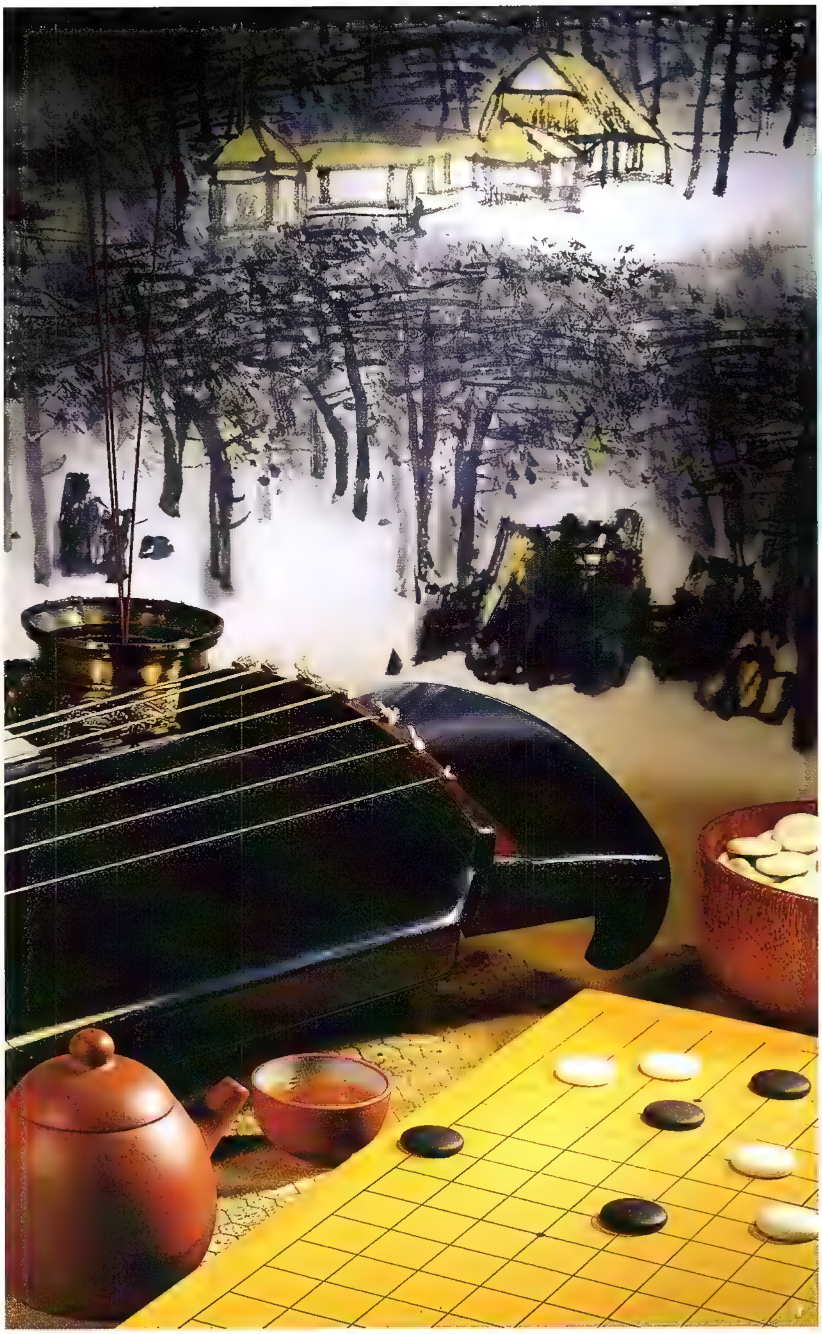
Postscript

Realizing Her Dream

Rebecca Lee treasures her life more every day since the operation so she does not mind spending travelling for several hours to talk to students. Though she is sometimes disheartened by the bureaucracy of some government departments, if she can spread the seeds of scientific research amongst the next generation and encourage them to look after the earth from generation to generation she will be satisfied.

Throughout her work, she keeps in mind lines from a traditional Chinese poem: "Fallen flowers are not heartless, and they will become spring nutrient to grow even more beautiful blossoms", and "Spring silkworms spin silk no end until their deaths." She repeats that she hopes she can pass on what she has learnt and seen at the South Pole to the young, so that they will not fail the earth, which sustains us all.

We sincerely wish her good health and hope the materials, DVD, and pictures of the polar regions will soon be published for posterity's benefit.



Charming Guqin

In November 2003, UNESCO announced in Paris that the music of the *guqin* (古琴), the seven-stringed musical instrument, had been added to the list of "Masterpieces of the Oral and Intangible Heritage of Humanity", making it the second Chinese art form thus protected along with Kunqu Opera.

Photos & Article · Xie Guanghui

Pursuit of a Spiritual Life

The *guqin* is the oldest plucked musical instrument in China. It is said that Fuxishi (a legendary Chinese ruler who taught people how to fish, hunt and raise livestock) and Shennongshi (also known as Yandi, or the Red Emperor, another celebrated Chinese ruler who introduced agriculture and herbal medicine to the country) invented the *guqin*. Though there is no evidence to support this, it is believed that, inspired by the vibratory sound plucked strings made, ancient Chinese people began to craft musical instruments from bamboo tubes and wooden boards. This suggests that China's

1. Mastery of the *guqin*, Chinese chess, calligraphy and painting were the four compulsory skills prized by the literati of ancient times. The Guqin has had a far-reaching impact on the Chinese histories of music, social culture and ideology.

2. A *guqin* is crafted to a strict set of standards. It should be 3.65 feet long (about 122 cm) for the 365 days in a year. The upper surface must arc to represent Heaven, while the flat bottom symbolizes the Earth. The 13 inlaid white dots, or "hui", along the edge of the fret board are finger position markers that stand for the 12 months in a year plus a leap month, in accordance with the lunar calendar.

earliest ancestors aspired to a spiritual life in the spare time between their hunting missions. Chinese characters are derived from pictographs. If we break down the traditional Chinese character "樂" (pronounced *yue*), meaning "music", we see that the lower section is "木", which means "wood", while "白" in the upper middle section resembles a tuning panel and the symbols on either side of "白" suggest strings. When the three sections come together, they vividly resemble a guqin.

During the Zhou Dynasty (c. 1100—256 B.C.), the *guqin* was only played in the imperial court. The systematic organization and compilation of *guqin* melodies into written musical notes, rather than Chinese characters, during the Tang Dynasty (618—907) ensured that the music would be passed down to later generations. In the Song and Yuan dynasties (960—1368), large numbers of monks skilled at playing and composing for the *guqin* incorporated Zen-sect Buddhism into their music. During the Ming and Qing dynasties (1368—1911), different schools of *guqin* music were formed, each with its own unique style. The then thriving commercial activities and prosperity of the publishing industry also helped popularize the music. In modern times, improvements in music notation and the rise of *guqin* associations played a significant role in the development of the musical instrument.

Highest of the Four Arts

The *guqin* not only has a long history but also a very beautiful sound. Its pure, distinctive and delicate tones make it unsuitable for ensemble performances. Ancient Chinese scholars deemed poetry a mere literary pursuit but regarded the ability to play the guqin as the epitome of spiritual refinement. Mastery of the *guqin*, ancient Chinese chess, calligraphy and painting (qin 琴, qi 棋, shu書, hua畫) made up the four compulsory skills of ancient Chinese literati, with the ability to play the *guqin* being the most revered. The *guqin* has had a far-reaching impact on the Chinese histories of music, social culture and ideology.

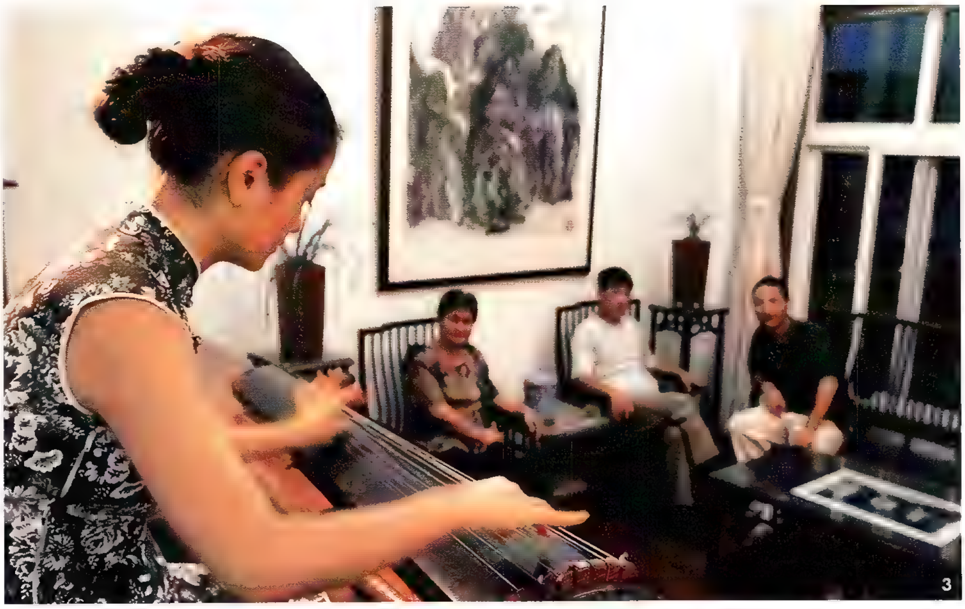
A *guqin* is crafted to a strict set of standards. It should be 3.65 feet long (about 122 cm) for the 365 days in a year. The upper surface must arc to represent Heaven, while the flat bottom symbolizes the Earth. The 13 inlaid white dots, or "hui", along the edge of the fret board are finger position markers. They stand for the 12 months in a year and a leap month, in accordance with the lunar calendar. The entire body of the *guqin* is resonant. The finger board on top

1. The *guqin* not only has a long history but also produces beautiful tones. Its distinctive, delicate sound makes it unsuitable for ensemble performances.

2. In the past, *guqin* strings were made of silk, which produced a soft, deep sound. Today, due to the scarcity of high-quality silk strings, most players use the more durable nylon flat-wound steel strings.

3. A treasured moment: listening to guqin music with a few close friends.

4. Several elderly people play the Guqin and Chinese chess beside Hangzhou's West Lake. What an elegant life!



and the sound holes hidden at the back give the *guqin* a pure, clear, elegant and deeply echoing tone. It can produce three types of sounds: an open sound, an overtone and a stopped sound. The open sound is similar to a drum or bell, primitive, sober and deep; the overtone is bright, light and rich in changes (the *guqin* has more overtones than any other instrument in the world); and the stopped sound is soft and deep, like a whisper.

Ancient Chinese regarded the light, soft and smooth wood of the phoenix tree as the best material for making the top board of a *guqin*, while hard catalpa tree wood was thought to suit the bottom board. But phoenix tree wood is so soft that it can't endure the friction caused by the strings over time. To remedy this, ancient Chinese craftsmen burnt deer antlers or bones and ground them into dust, which they then mixed with lacquer that they used to coat the surface of the *guqin*. When that dried, they used a rubbing stone or sandpaper to polish the surface. This method protected the wood and produced a better sound quality. After a long time, the surface of a *guqin* is likely to develop cracks. The older a *guqin*, the more cracks it will have. The more cracks on the surface, the more beautiful and ancient the *guqin* appears.

A Singular Pleasure

Today's guqins are all seven-stringed, but the early ones didn't have a fixed number of strings. The Book of Music of the Han Dynasty (206 B.C.—220) records guqin with five, seven, 10, 15 and 20 strings, but the seven-stringed were the most common. After the Han Dynasty, the number of strings was set at seven, which is why the *guqin* is also known as "the seven-stringed instrument". In the past, *guqin* strings were made of silk, which produced soft, deep and broad tones, but the sound did not carry. More subtle musical passages could not be heard from even a metre away. As a result, it was unsuited to large performance spaces. This is what gives the *guqin* its solitary character, best played for the pleasure of a few. Silk is a natural protein product that can break easily and silken strings need to be tuned often in humid climates, causing problems for guqin players. Today nylon flat-wound steel strings are used for their durability and greater resonance.

Chinese director Zhang Yimou's recent film *Hero* included a scene in which a white-haired old man was playing the *guqin*. Although the scene was a bit awkward, it left a deep impression on audiences. Now that the art of *guqin* music is on the list of "Masterpieces of the Oral and Intangible Heritage of Humanity", its charming, melodious tones can be shared with the rest of the world.

Translated by Nicole Ouyang

Travel Tips

Cultural centres Changshu and Suzhou in East China's Jiangsu Province are the joint birthplaces of *guqin* and the first cities to have their own schools, associations and representative players of *guqin* music. The Yushan Qin She (虞山琴社) association, named after Yushan Mountain in Changshu, was established in the late Ming Dynasty (1368—1644). It has a membership of 129 gifted *guqin* players. Every provincial music hall arranges *guqin* performances throughout the year for the public's enjoyment.

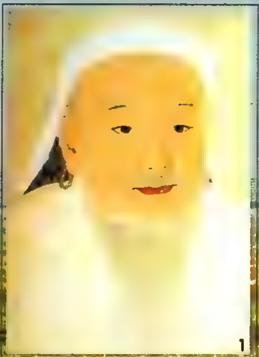
We also recommend visiting:

1. Poxian Qin Guan (坡仙琴館) in Yiyuan Garden
Add: Middle section of Renmin Road, Suzhou
Transport: Bus 1, 8, 9, 101 or 102
2. Wangshi Garden
Add: Shiquan Street, Suzhou
Transport: Tour Bus No 2, or Bus 4, 401, 14 or 29

The Mongolian ethnic people conquered the Central Plains (ie, the middle and lower reaches of the Yellow River, comprising most of Henan Province, the western part of Shandong Province and the southern parts of Hebei and Shanxi provinces) after passing through the Hulun Buir Grassland. The photo shows the Ujimqin Grassland to the southwest of the Hulun Buir Grassland.

1. Genghis Khan (1162–1227) united all Mongolian tribes and nomadic tribes on the grasslands and established the Mongolian Khanate.

2. Genghis Khan's grandson, Kublai Khan (1215–1294), established the Yuan Dynasty (1271–1368), when China had the largest territory in history.



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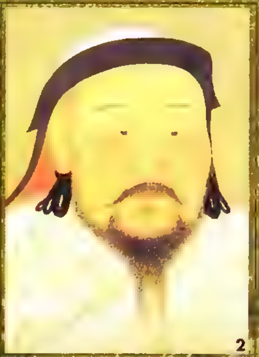

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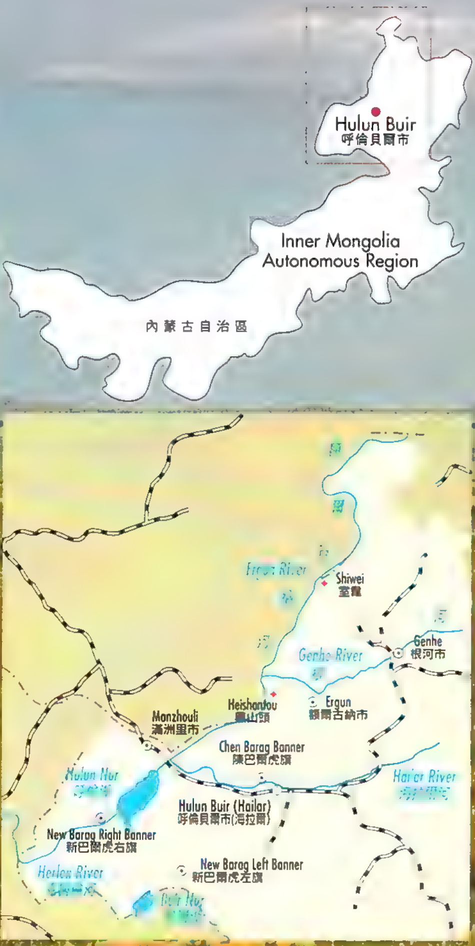
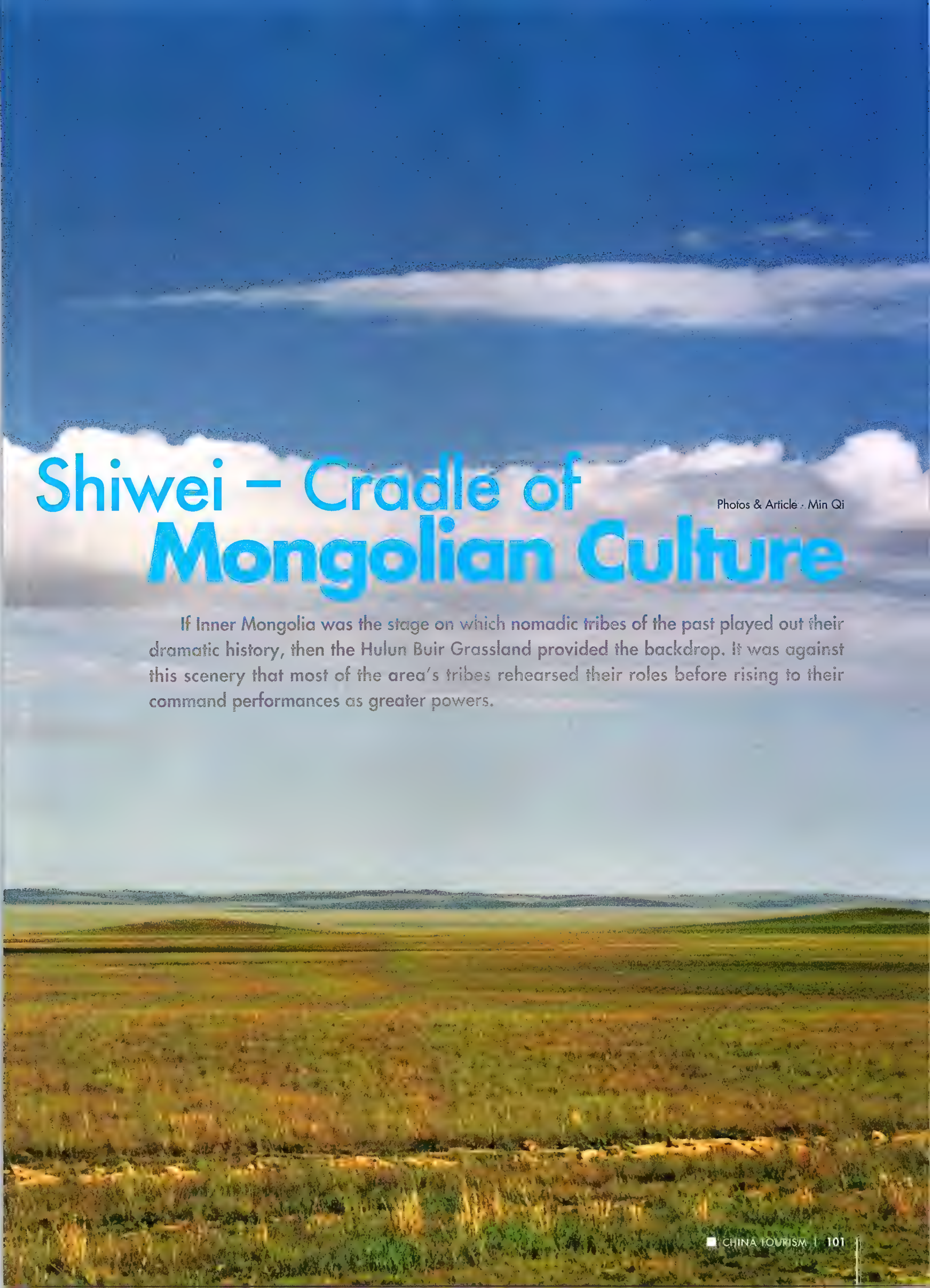

Hulun Buir
呼倫貝爾市
Inner Mongolia Autonomous Region
內蒙古自治區
Ergun River
Shiwei
室韋
Genhe
根河市
Genhe River
Heishantou
黑山頭
Ergun
額爾古納市
Manzhouli
滿洲里市
Chen Barag Banner
陳巴爾虎旗
Hulun Nur
Hailar River
Hulun Buir (Hailar)
呼倫貝爾市(海拉爾)
New Barag Right Banner
新巴爾虎右旗
New Barag Left Banner
新巴爾虎左旗
Herlen River
Buir Nur



Shiwei – Cradle of Mongolian Culture

Photos & Article · Min Qi

If Inner Mongolia was the stage on which nomadic tribes of the past played out their dramatic history, then the Hulun Buir Grassland provided the backdrop. It was against this scenery that most of the area's tribes rehearsed their roles before rising to their command performances as greater powers.

In Chinese history, two ethnic groups – the Xianbei of the Eastern Han Dynasty (25–220) and the Mongol of the Sui and Tang dynasties (581–907) – invaded the Central Plains after passing through the Hulun Buir Grassland. Today, tourists visit to the grassland on sightseeing trips, while anthropologists and historians come to study the ancient nomadic tribes. But I went there seeking the birthplace of the Mongolian people – the Shiwei.

Ancestors of Ethnic Mongolians

The general impression people have of Mongolians is that of brave and skilled warriors. This "ethnic group on horseback" originates from Shiwei Township in the northeast of the Inner Mongolian Autonomous Region bordering China and Russia. The Shiwei tribe was made up of five subgroups. From the Northern and Southern dynasties (420–589), these groups lived in today's Hulun Buir League and western Heilongjiang Province. The smaller Mengwu Shiwei group that inhabited the lower reaches of the Ergun River and the area south of Heilongjiang Province are the very ancestors of the Mongolian ethnic group.

In the eighth century, the Mengwu Shiwei left the forest area, headed west and crossed Hulun Lake to enter the grassland. In 1206, following several hundred years of tribal battles, Genghis Khan united all of the Mongolian and nomadic tribes on the grasslands and established the powerful Mongolian Khanate, which launched campaigns as far away as Europe. Genghis Khan's grandson, Kublai Khan, went on to establish the Yuan Dynasty, which became the largest territorial dynasty ever and launched a glorious era in Chinese history.

I travelled to Shiwei with two friends, along the same route that Genghis Khan took in 1203 through Buir Lake on his way to the Hulun Buir League. We planned to visit the volcanic lakes of the Chalchyn Gol River area on the way, but we had no idea that the section of the river just before Xing'anling Mountain would itself be so clear and beautiful. Flowers, bushes and willows dotted the river valley and horses grazed casually nearby. It was hard to relate this tranquil scene to the fierce battles waged between the Mongolian tribes so long ago.

1. Most of Shiwei's residents are now ethnically Russian, not Mongolian.

2. The Mengwu Shiwei Mongolian tribe left the forest area, crossed Hulun Lake (pictured) and headed west to the grassland. The ethnic Mongolian race rose from the Ergun River.

3. The Mongolians first developed their power from the Ergun River.

4. Vast, serene and crystal blue Buir Lake.

Crossing the Hulun and Buir Lakes

There are actually two lakes, the "Hulun" and the "Buir", at Hulun Buir. On our second day, we drove across a wood out of Buir Lake and headed south, arriving at the lake within half an hour. We raced along the lakeside at full speed, without having to worry about bumpy roads or the possibility of hitting another car – a memorable thrill!

We were stunned by the lake's vastness, tranquillity and deep blue water. It is so huge that we couldn't see the opposite shore, and the water was such a pure, clear blue that was almost like crystal. Being secluded, it retains its primitive beauty and unspoilt charm. We should be grateful to the Hundelun frontline fort, because without its protection, Buir Lake would have undoubtedly become polluted by now. We were due in Manzhouli that night, so after a meal of fish we rushed straight on to Hulun Lake. Hulun was called "big lake" in ancient times, as it is five to six times larger than Buir Lake.

Up until the eighth century, the Mengwu Shiwei inhabited the forest to the east of the Ergun River. Then Bortie China, the forefather of the Mengwu Shiwei, led his people out of the woods, so to speak. They crossed Hulun Lake in the west and headed to the source of the Herlen, Onun, and Tula rivers. Over the following five centuries, the Mengwu Shiwei steadily established their dominant role in Mongolian history. Crossing Hulun Lake was the Mengwu Shiwei's first step onto the world stage. That night, we checked into a hotel in Manzhouli. The town's architecture is heavily Russian-influenced and every shop name is written in both Chinese and Russian. Russians are so prevalent on the streets that, for a moment, I thought I must have crossed the border without realizing it.

Approaching Shiwei

Travelling north from Manzhouli, we headed for Shiwei, its very name taken from the Mongolian ethnic group. But this place is no longer inhabited by Mongolians. Most residents here are ethnically Russian.

Shiwei Township sits near the east bank of the

内蒙古自治区重点文物保护单位
黑山頭古城
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Ergun River, with the town of Heishantou approximately 200 km to the south. From Shiwei Village to Heishantou the road is paved with sand and stones, making it very smooth. After heading west out of Heishantou, we turned right onto another road and soon came upon the heavily rolling Genhe River, which flows into the Ergun.

Standing on a hilltop north of the river, I looked into the distance through my binoculars. The hill was surrounded by a huge marshland that forms the delta where Djamouqa (Genghis Khan's "sworn" brother) was enthroned as "Gu'er Khan". On the left side of the road, in front of the hill, remnants of some walls where the famed Heishantou Ancient City once stood were visible. According to historical documents, the Ergun River drainage area was conferred to Genghis Khan's immediate younger brother; partial pillar bases and broken tiles are all that remain.

Not far from the ancient city, to the north of Wuka, is the Baisi Gulang Ural ("Ural" means mountain in Mongolian), by far the best place to

1. The city of Heishantou is said to have been built in the Ming Dynasty (1368–1644).

2. After crossing the Genhe River Bridge, we entered the fertile grassland at the western foot of the Greater Hinggan Range.

3. The Barag Grassland is boundless. Buir Lake is in New Barag Left Banner.

4. The Chalchyn Gol River, where Genghis Khan once engaged in fierce battle in the autumn of 1202.

view the Ergun River. At 924 metres above sea level, this is the highest mountain along the Ergun. Standing on the mountain, I gasped at the breathtaking scenery. The nearly 100-metre wide river resembled a soft silk sash wound over a lush green skirt of land embroidered with flowers. To the west, out of sight on the other side of the mountain in what is now part of Russia, is Genghis Khan's birthplace, the Onun River. In 1206, at the source of this river, Tiemuzhen (Khan's name at birth) raised his flag, proclaimed his kingdom "Great Mongolia" and was revered as Genghis Khan. Not far downriver is Nerchinsk, for which the Treaty of Nerchinsk (1689) was named. Under this treaty the Qing government was forced to cede a large section of territory to the west of the Ergun River to the Russian Tsar.

Shiwei – Strong Russian Flavour

Knowing there were no restaurants on the way to Shiwei where we could stop for lunch, we prepared some food ahead of time. It was just as well as we thoroughly enjoyed standing in the knee-high grass at Baisi Gulang Mountain, eating and taking in the Ergun River scenery. We passed through a few villages built during the Qing Dynasty. Then we walked on the lowland along the river until we arrived at Shiwei Village. Shiwei's many blue-eyed, black-haired residents are descendents of Shandong people and Russians, who came here three generations ago to pan for gold. With their light-coloured eyes and prominent noses, they seemed to be foreigners, until they burst out speaking the Northeast Chinese dialect. That struck me as very funny!

We stayed with a Russian woman, Zhang Jianhua, and her family. Her sitting room was clean and tidy, decorated in a Russian style. She offered us real Russian food: borscht, fried meat sandwiches, bread and butter, and pickled cucumbers. During the meal, Zhang's husband played the accordion while she sang Russian songs and danced with us. The curtain then fell on our journey to the ancestral land of the Mengwu Shiwei, which had a surprising, but happy, ending.

Translated by Nicole Ouyang

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Mongolians and Rivers

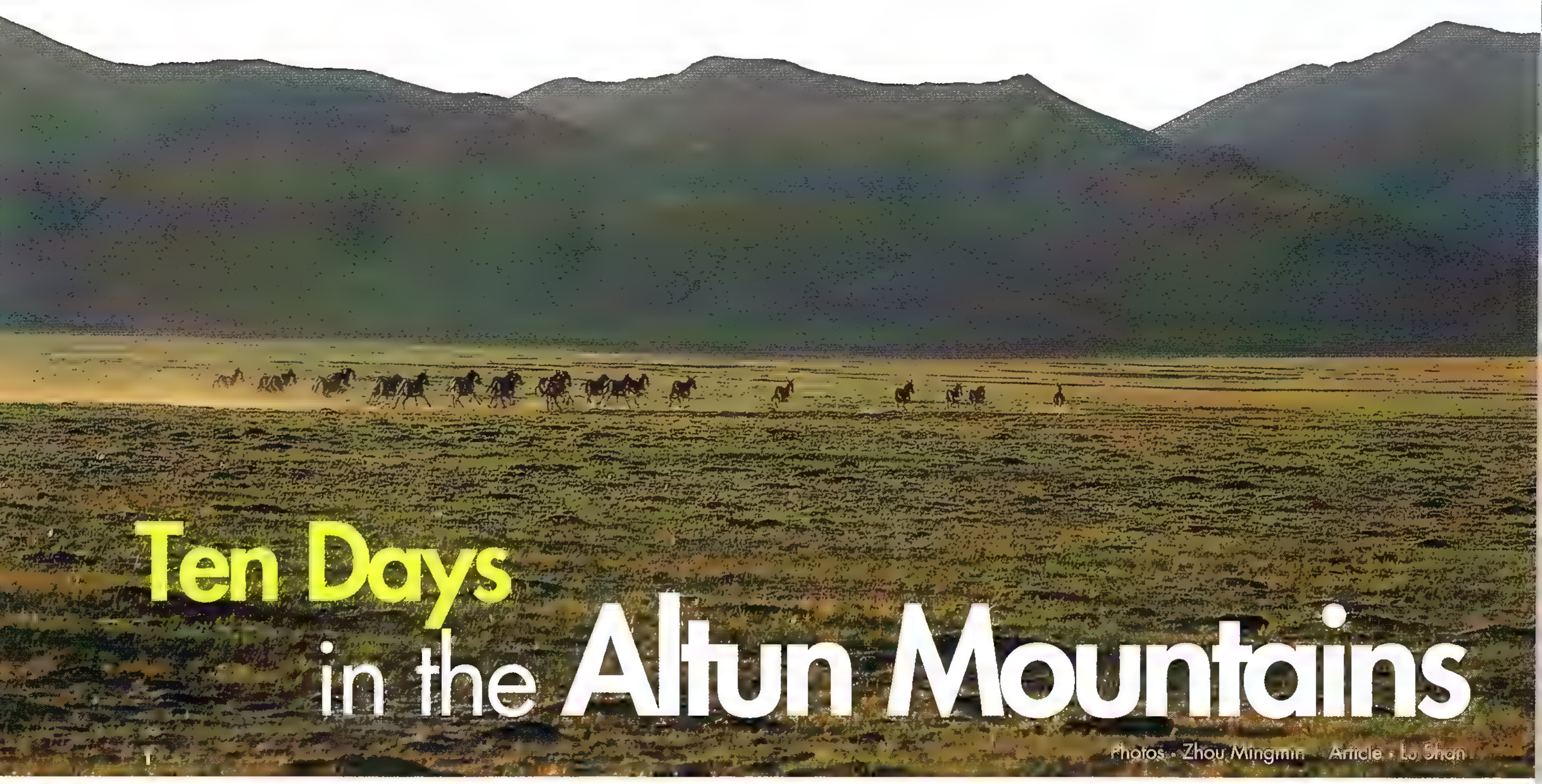
The rise of an ethnic group is often closely linked with the rivers they settle near, and the Mongolians are no exception. The Hailar, Genhe and Ergun rivers on the upper reaches of the Heilongjiang (Black Dragon River) are intertwined with the history of the Mongolian ethnic group. Many place names around these rivers are evidence that the Mongolian ancestors lived here.

The Hailar River, originally called the Haile Shui, is the main source of the Ergun River. The city of Hailar (today's Hulun Buir City), capital of the Hulun Buir League, is situated on a mesa south of the middle section of the Hailar River.

Genhe is short for "Mengen Gaole" in the Mongolian. It starts east of the Hinggan mountain ranges in Heilongjiang Province and runs west to the Ergun. The cities of Genhe and Ergun are located at the middle and lower reaches of the Genhe River, respectively.

The Ergun begins from the Hailar and ends at the Shilege River in the territory of Mongolia (further down from which is the Heilongjiang River). The primeval forest of the Greater Hinggan Range lies east of the Ergun and the expansive grassland spreads out to its west.

In addition to these three rivers, the Herlen River that flows into Hulun Lake also played an important role in Mongolia's past. Tiemuzhen (old name of Genghis Khan) last fought here in 1178, long before establishing the Mongol Khanate in 1206. The Herlen is as important to Mongolian history as Tiemuzhen's birthplace, the Onun River (the upper part of the Shilege River now in Russian territory). The Herlen is a small, inconspicuous grassland river that flows from the Daxing'anling Range. In rainless seasons, it has been known to dry up. But today's Mongolians still sing of it with a deep love.



Ten Days in the Altun Mountains

Photos · Zhou Mingmin Article · Lu Shan

In June 2004 I travelled from Guangdong to Urümqi in Xinjiang Uygur Autonomous Region from which I took a plane to Korla and a car to Ruoqiang via Yuli. A long and complicated trip but its purpose was worthwhile — to report on the Tibetan antelope and gold prospecting in the Altun Mountain Nature Reserve.

Different to other protected areas, Altun Mountain Reserve prohibits shepherding within its boundaries and thus the entire area is practically void of human life. On this trip, we had to rely for everything on ourselves.

Length of Journey: 10 days

Equipment: Besides three jeeps - Desert King, Mitsubishi 3400 and a 3.2 Wushi Ling - we also brought along an Eastern Dakka jeep as a backup and storage for 11 barrels of gas, rice for half a month, daily necessities and military tents for 14 people.

Pre-departure preparations: Buying food (biscuits, chocolate and other foods to ward off hunger), repair equipment, and especially equipment for repairing the cars.

June 13 Setting out with High Hopes

We set out at 8 a.m., passing through canyons, grasslands, the Gobi desert on a particularly tiring and hard journey. Many times we came across places where the road had been washed away by flash floods; at other times we crept along cliffs with only three tires on the ground. Despite such hazards, we arrived safely at Mangnai Asbestos Factory after 12 hours. Despite the late hour it was still very bright, due to the time difference in this far part of western China.

We took a walk down the deserted main street. The wind whipped across the street, tumbling garbage and spreading dust in the air like poisonous asbestos shreds. It was a bleak and despondent scene.

June 14 The Supplies Station

Early the next morning we set off from the asbestos factory towards Yazi Quan (Duck Spring). The road today was even harder than yesterday with many marshes and bogs challenging the progress of our fleet. Our driver, a Uygur names Sulaiman, had over 20 years experience traversing the high plains and thus was able to steer us through places where the road had disappeared based on his readings of the surrounding mountains and landforms. After all, the sands may shift and the road may disappear but the mountains won't disappear!

Duck Spring is the first supplies stop at Altun Mountain and as the gate to entering and leaving the mountain, is also a great place to store supplies such as gasoline for the return journey.

The only inhabitants at the supplies station were a man, his wife and their child while the supplies station itself was little more than a hut made from

chains. Without any other neighbours for miles around, the family relies solely on people passing through the protection station like us. One visitor could see them through a couple of months. Their four years old child was overjoyed to see us. Without playmates, a TV or any contact with the outside world, I felt a knot in my heart watching his smiling face as he played around us.

That night I slept the most soundly I did on the entire trip. Despite sleeping on the floor, at least I had a roof over my head. Once in the protected zone, it would be only a thin slice of tent fabric between me and the night sky.

June 15-16 Ice Over the Bog

We spent the next few days searching for wild animals in the hills to photo, but in the end only came across wild donkeys and yellow goats, not a single Tibetan antelope to be seen.

In the afternoon, we met a sudden hailstorm — in the middle of June! The temperature was dropping rapidly as we approached Dafeng Kou (Great Wind Pass) at 5,200 metres above sea level. Here, there was virtually no road, and the earth underneath was soft and loose. Due to these treacherous conditions, our cars had to pass across the canyon floor by night, making use of the thin layer of ice over the ground to prevent the car wheels from becoming bogged in the mud. With such a looming deadline, our cars had to press on non-stop around the clock to reach Great Wind Pass in the early hours of the morning.

As the night drew on, coldness set in, especially around the knees. No matter how many clothes I wrapped around my legs, they could not stop the cold from invading my bones. But no matter how uncomfortable I became, I had to spare a thought for the drivers — red-eyed and yawning, they were the exhausted ones by far.

June 17 The Magic of Two Flowers

In the morning we arrived smoothly at the mouth where Baishui River fed into the saltwater Tuzi Hu (Rabbit Lake). After an exhausting night, everyone got busy cooking breakfast, making repairs or taking a nap. I myself took a walk around the camp. All around us the landscape was filled by a barren stretch of dry, brown grass peppered occasionally by the odd flower which I stooped to photo, moved to have found something so beautiful in a landscape so ungodly.

1. Wild donkeys nearby Duck Spring.

2. The ever-varying landscape of Altun Mountains is a characteristic of the area and brings many difficulties to our traveling fleet.

3. A sudden snowfall makes it harder to navigate.

4. The protection zone staff.

I also noticed a layer of red moss on the ground. The people in the supplies station told me this was the moss the Tibetan antelope ate. We were getting close.

June 18 Lost

I arose early to fetch water from Rabbit Lake only to find the surface of the lake covered in frozen chips of ice. Jagged around the edges, the chips shone like many diamonds under the sun and I could still hear the gurgling of water running underneath. As before, the desolate landscape stretched around me without the hint of another human being.

Although we had brought a car full of supplies, there was still a hint of insecurity around the camp. Truly, here in the middle of nowhere, there were no creature comforts.

Today our exploration team went to investigate the gold mines leaving us with a few precious hours to take photos of Altun Mountain's main peak Muztag Peak by the side of Liyu (Carp) Lake. However no matter from afar or up close, the peaks remained sheltered behind a screen of fine mist and cloud. By 7 p.m. we had come across a spider-web-like landscape; far off mountains appeared close by, and the landscape became a blur of familiar shapes seen

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once before. We began to feel uncertain where we were and I began silently feeling a dread in my stomach. To be lost here wouldn't be a matter of one or two days, but could be forever. Our mobile phones were useless and we had left the walkie-talkies behind for recharging.

Just as we were all beginning to panic, the exploration team we had left this morning appeared in front of us. We realized we had become terribly lost from our original bearings, and by sheer luck had come across the exploration team. Otherwise, who knew where we might have ended up?

June 19 Don't Fall Asleep

In our party there was a policeman surnamed Ye who had much experience in undertaking exploratory missions including near escapes from death. One day when Ye drove out on a mission he ran out of petrol and was forced to walk back 40 km to buy 20 litres of petrol and then carry it back to his car. To accomplish this amazing feat his advice was to throw away his matches and never sit down to light a fire. That way the body wouldn't get hungry and want to take a nap next to the fire. Ye knew that in this type of environment if he fell asleep he would never wake again.

At 7 p.m. that night we set up camp by the side of Ayakkum Lake, 4,800 metres above sea level. A strong wind blew off the massive lake and pitching our tents became a problem. We spread out to search for rocks to bolster the tents' defenses against the wind, but the altitude was making it hard for us to move and breathe. Finally, after much effort, we gathered enough stones just before we were plunged into a deep dark night. However, the wind continued to blow all night, and we spent a restless night waking up time and again to replace the rocks that had fallen from the wind.

June 20 A Bath at 4,800 Metres

In the early morning, I awoke to find a tent full of gleaming crystals like I had entered some wintry palace found in a fairytale. It turned out that the temperature had dropped below zero during the night and our warm breath had solidified into tiny droplets of ice clinging on to the tent roof. An amazing and wonderful sight.

That morning as our cars set out across a broad plain I truly came to realize how big China actually is. It was snowing at that time and the haze of whiteness made it difficult to distinguish any landscape markings, let along north, south, east or west. After we had crossed the third river, the driver suddenly realized we were off track and stopped the car to find the correct road. Just at that moment a wild ox

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appeared as a black spot in a field of white. Our diver yelled "There's an ox, let's go!" He explained wild ox are formidable creatures and have been known to butt cars as they ran alongside causing cars to overturn or worse.

Getting back on track we continued to drive until lunchtime when I got out of the car to take some photos. In the distance I spied a large gray wolf walking slowly across the fields. Over the last few days I had seen wolves, oxen, goats, donkeys, marmots, a bear on the run, eagles, vultures and a Tibetan antelope running across a mountain pathway. Not a bad collection overall!

Since hitting the road none of us had had a chance to bathe once; for a Cantonese like myself, this was just too much. Luckily there was a small stream close to our camp that noon, so I made use of the midday break to take a quick sponge bath. The water was icy and the temperature at 4,800 metres was low, but my spirits were revived.

June 21 Bogged Down

This morning one of our travelling group reported they had seen headlights around four to five kilometres in the distance. However Li told us that judging by the scanty marks on the road it had already been quite a long time since another car had passed through here. The protection zone was serving its purpose.

That night we began our return journey and the frantic rush to reach Great Wind Pass before the ice melted.

But when we reached the pass we discovered the ground had been turned into mush by a passing storm. Our cars became stranded in the sinking mud. Luckily the Desert King was on hand to tow us out. Truly, this was when a 4WD car came into its own!

That night I frantically went from car to car pushing and digging in the dark, without a clue whether we could get out of this mess. My clothes were covered in mud and tiny icicles had formed around my shoulders. But none of dared stop for a second — who could care about altitude sickness at such a time?

In the end, the old driver Sumanli guided us up and out of the bog onto the road home. Through this experience I deeply realized the risks faced every day by the protection station staff. Theirs was truly a tough life.

June 22 Sand Storm

After getting through the pass, our spirits lifted immeasurably. The sun was out and a quiet calm replaced the fear and desperation of the previous night. We were descending in altitude too, so the effects of altitude sickness were beginning to wear off. As we passed through Duck Spring again, we handed over the remains of our food supply to the family there.

On the way back we came across a sandstorm, fortunately a small one. The driver turned the car around to take the brunt of the wind and from the windows we could see wave after wave of sand twirling across the road. Alas, no chance to take a photo, since no camera would withstand such a beating by the sand.

That day we quickly ate our dinner at Ruoqiang and headed all night for Korla.

June 23 Return to Civilisation

We finally arrived at Korla in the morning and it felt like paradise! What a difference it made to be on a paved road, with buildings all around and tree branches rustling in the wind. By the time we arrived at the hotel, my body was limp and tired but nothing could hold back my yearning for a comfortable bed.

Later, back in Shenzhen, I gave thanks for the small conveniences of modern life while feeling inwardly conflicted. On the one hand, in Shenzhen we seem to want to escape modern life, but when we do, we yearn for a return. No doubt this is a paradox plaguing travellers everywhere.

Translated by Bret Sutcliffe

1. Morning at Ayakkum Lake.

2. Wild flowers survive the harsh desert conditions.

3. Red moss provides a staple food for the Tibetan antelope diet.

Altun Mountain Nature Reserve

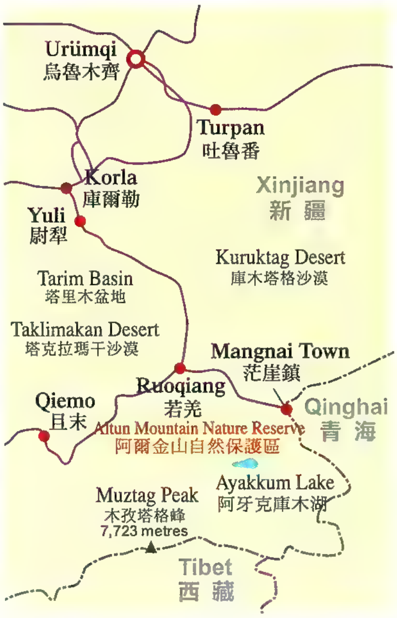
Altun Mountain Nature Reserve is the world's highest protected ecology zone. The zone was established in 1983 and approved by the State Council as a national-level protected zone in 1985. At 45,000 square metres in size and at an average height of 4,200 metres, the zone is located on the southern slopes of the Altun Mountain range and extend from the South to the eastern Kunlun Mountains, in the West to the two county lines of Ruoqiang and Qiemo, and in the East to the intersection of Xinjiang and Qinghai Province. The zone is the world's largest protected zone on land.

Tibetan Antelope

The Tibetan antelope has long been a favourite target of illegal poachers for its delicate and soft coat which is prized as a material used in luxurious shawls priced at over US$10,000 in the world's most expensive boutiques. Fortunately, the numbers of Tibetan antelopes in the protected zone has increased markedly in recent years. From an estimated 12,000 in 1995, Tibetan antelope now number around 30,000 ~ 40,000.

Gold Diggers

In Uygur language, 'Altun' means 'gold' and a local saying has is that 'if you plant gold here you will receive gold in return.' Every spring nomads looking for gold enter the protected zone and cause damage to plants and the natural landscape. Many times, the gold foragers also take to poaching, either to supplement their own food supplies or as an added bounty. The protected zone patrol team is charged with eradicating such crimes.



When city life gets too hectic, get away from it all — there are more than 300 leisure farms in Taiwan. These ideal retreats do not just offer fresh food and quaint quarters, but a host of activities like feeding lambs and calves, enjoying fields of flowers and the butterflies that dot them, counting the stars... being a weekend farmer is much fun.

Farming Fun in Taiwan

Photos & Article • Mickey Ching

Cowboy's Heaven

Flying Cow Ranch

1. The Flying Cow Farm has more than 500 cows, the décor also abounds with cow designs.

2. Take part in the many DIY activities offered at the farm, especially the cow-painting. (courtesy of Flying Cow Ranch)

3. Cake-making with fresh milk.

4. Ever seen how cows are milked?

Getting to Flying Cow Ranch ...

Add: No.166, Nanhe Li, Tongxiao Town, Miaoli County 35750

Tel: (37) 782 999/ 782 844

Website: www.flyingcow.com.tw

Admissions: NT$200; free activities include bunny sports, eco-lecture on butterflies, calf-feeding, cow-milking; other activities 1) ice cream shake, $80; milk cake, $120; DIY milk jelly, paint your own cow and DIY grandma's cookies, etc.

Transport: Take a train from Taipei station to Miaoli station, then take a taxi.

Meals: Specialities include milk-marinated pork chops, yoghurt fruit and vegetable salad, etc.

Accommodation: Deluxe double suite, NT$3,300, courtyard cottage or Japanese cottage also available, from $4,200~4,600 (accommodation includes admission)

I was greeted with humid heat at Taipei CKS airport, but not for long —I got on the air-conditioned bus bound for the Flying Cow Ranch in Miaoli County. It didn't disappoint, with the vast expanse of grassland, the quaint houses with red tiles and dairy cows — one could be fooled into thinking this was some European rural retreat! I closed my eyes and took a deep breath — the clean air was sweet with the scent of grass.

Farm Fun with the Cows ...

A visit to the Flying Cow Farm is obviously going to focus on cows! The farm has about 450 Holstein dairy cows. Best of all, you can see how the calves are fed. The staff tell us that the calves here all start out drinking baby milk formula. They feed the calves with a two-litre bottle of milk per day until they're old enough to hit the meadows on their own, that is, by the time they're three to six months old. The cute calves have nametags on their ears, the ones named "Du Du" and "Amy" were sucking so hard they even pulled the teats off the bottles! After the feeding, I went to check out the milking process. The staff cleaned the cows' breasts, then disinfected them, squeezed away the impurities, this was followed by about six to seven minutes of milking with a vacuum pump, finally the cows were smeared with a balm containing iodine. Although it may be more efficient and hygienic to use machinery to milk cows, I couldn't help feeling warm hands were a gentler touch.

DIY Dairy Products ...

That's not all there is to the farm. Here you can also learn to use the farm fresh milk to cook up a storm. Why not have a try making a milk cake? It takes only about 20 minutes, with the end result being fluffy, fragrant, better than any shop-bought cake. If you're interested in trying anything else, the farm shop sells all kinds of foods made from milk, from milk buns, biscuits, candy, cakes to chocolate. There are even beauty products like facial cleanser, lotion, shower gel and shampoos made with milk, so you can "milk" the trip for all its worth.

Looking for the Flying Cow ...

After all, where is the flying cow? If that's why you came, you may be disappointed. The name of the farm refers to the butterflies and the cows at the farm. There is a butterfly centre at the farm, with specimens of moths and butterflies. The only real flying cow can be found near the entrance of the farm, where there is a sculpture surrounded with dozens of flowers like Cosmos, Star Cluster, Angelonia, Red Powderpuff, don't forget to take a photo of this flying cow for the travel albums!

A Floral World
Taiyi Farm

Once I left the European style farm, I turned my attention to Puli, in Nantou County of Taichung, in preparation for a "feast of flowers". Puli is where Taiyi Eco-education farm, or Taiyi for short, is located. Here it's all about flowers — from the décor, accommodation, even the food, it is like being in a sea of flowers.

Floral Toilet ...

You will lose count the number of places here festooned with flowers. As soon as you enter, the Pantheon of Flower God square offers people a place to make a wish. While the building full of flowers right next door turned out to be the toilet. It's not a widely known fact that Nantou County produces about 60% of the vegetables consumed in Taiwan while most of Nantou's vegetable seedlings are grown in Taiyi. No wonder Taiyi is known as "king of flowers".

A Feast For All Senses...

Feasting one's eyes on flowers may not be anything special, but Taiyi is probably the only place in Taiwan where you can taste them too. The globeflowers salad was a refreshing and tasty appetizer, while the "torenia sushi" was lighter and more fragrant than the sushi we're used to eat. Even ashitaba, the leaf of immortality that a past Chinese emperor had searched for immorality, has been made into a superb soup with health properties, one of which is boosting immunity. Imagine it, savouring the colours, scents and textures of the floral banquet at the garden restaurant on the water, while the colourful fountain splashes outside, what more could you ask for!

Flower Cottages on the Water ...

After a tiring day, I looked forward to my stay in a flower cottage on the water. These cottages with high gabled roofs built on the water are decorated with flowers and look charming with their latticed windows. There are ramps and walkways, while pairs of "lovebirds" — black swans swim nearby, the romance will make you feel like "love is all around". You'll also find fairy tale cottages and the only European three-storey building called "flower inn", with a "star gazing room" that lets you count the stars.

Getting to Taiyi Eco-education Leisure Farm ...

Add: No.176, First Section, Zhongshan Road, Puli Town, Nantou County

Tel: (49) 290 1346

Website: www.taii.com.tw/

Transport: Take the Guoguang bus from Taipei to Puli, then take the Nantou bus to "Cuifeng, Lushan, Wushe", get off at Taiyi station

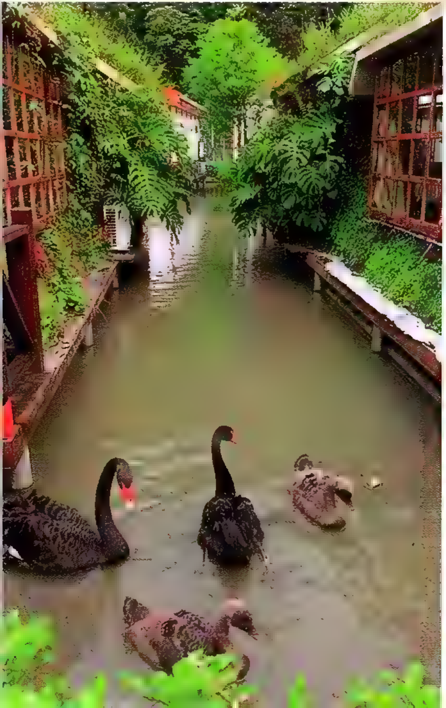
Admission: NT$100

Meals: Floral feast NT$3,000 ~ $5,000, booking three days ahead essential

Accommodation: (normal season) fairy tale cottages (double room), NT$1,400; romantic floral cottage on the water (double/ quadruple rooms), NT$2,520/$3,500; flower inn (double/ quadruple rooms), NT$2,520/ $3,360,

Reservations: (49) 290 1346 (ext. 156)

1. Enjoying a flower feast at the restaurant on the water is utterly romantic.
2. Pairs of black swans frolic near the greenhouse on the water.
3. There is a large nursery near the farm that cultivates assorted flowers and vegetables.



Five-star Family Farm

Dakeng Leisure Farm

After Taichung, I had already left behind the stress of city living. Then it was time to head for the south of Taiwan, and the destination was Dakeng Leisure Farm — the best-known farm in Tainan.

Get Close to Nature ...

Dakeng farm earns points alone on its location. This farm of more than 10 hectares is in the hilly areas of Hutou Bei (Tiger Head Tablet), Xinhua Town. The unique landscape means some pretty unique farm activities. Take the path up the hill, you'll pass the herbarium in the farm. Once you get to the top, there is the 168-metre high scenic lookout. To make the most of the hilly surroundings, there are rope suspension bridges, flying foxes and other things to get your adrenaline pumping.

Irresistible Rustic Fare ...

After all that walking, it's time to refuel. Here the best produce the farm has to offer is served in exciting new styles. The house special is the chargrilled suckling pig, farm-fed suckling pigs are basted with a marinade that includes honey, salt, herbs and spices, the taste is a perfect combination of crispy skin and flavourful meat that melt in your mouth. There is a seafood and bamboo shoots congee made with a milk fish soup base; omelette with basil seeds; all of them things I never imagined, much less seen on a restaurant menu.

Invigorating Spa ...

To totally unwind, you can't beat a good soak in the spa at the farm. The Jacuzzi is divided into three areas by temperature: icy, warm and hot, with massage functions, all for a very reasonable NT$250. Then it's time to quench your thirst at a bar which makes up for what it lacks in size with ambiance, try the fruit teas blended with assorted fruits and hibiscus. There's even a live band here during the holiday season. It just shows that Dakeng farm offers the best of the country with city style.

All Family Affair ...

The farm is run by the Cai family. Grandpa and grandma feed the farm animals; Mr Cai is in charge of the roasting duties; whie his wife and second daughter come up with the other goodies on the menu; the eldest daughter runs the bar and creates the drinks; even the youngest daughter makes a contribution to craft delightful farm souvenirs from bamboo.

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Getting to Dakeng Leisure Farm ...

Add: No. 33, Wushulin, Tuqi Village, Longqi Township, Tainan County

Tel: (06) 594 1555

Website: www.168big.com.tw

Transport: Take a bus from Tainan train station to "Hutou Bei, Xinhua", get off at Dakeng farm

Admission: NT$200

Meals: From NT$500 (for group of 10); chargrilled suckling pig NT$5,000/ each (must book ahead); chargrilled free-range chicken NT$400/ each

Accommodation: Cottages, from NT$2,400, cottages with sauna and Japanese suites cost from $2,560 to $5,760

1. Dakeng farm offers lovely surroundings and genuine hospitality from the host family.
2. There are baths and pools at the farm to wash away your weariness.
3. The farm has an extensive menu of country fare, don't miss the speciality — chargrilled suckling pig.

Must-visit Taiwan's Farms ...

Postoral Fame

San Chun Old Tree

Tainan's San Chun Lao Shu Leisure Farm, is renowned for its ancient autumn maple tree. But that's just the beginning of the attractions here...

Get close to the ostriches: there's no shortage of things to do at the farm, check out the gardens, including the African jasmine maze, the sunflowers garden, houseleek garden, passionfruit tunnel. The animals area is even more unusual, aside from the usual frogs and rabbits, there are even ostriches. You're welcome to feed them and get up close and personal with the animals.

Pomegranate Ice: the al-fresco café and restaurant at the farm use the readily available ingredients in their food and drink creations. Huatan is the biggest producer of jasmine in Taiwan, Sanchun Old Tree's jasmine tea, jasmine wine, even country style jasmine hotpot are all popular picks. But my personal favourites are the products made from houseleek, this plant is rich in nutrients, it can be made into juice, even icypoles, or poached with medicinal herbs into a magnificent chicken stew. It's easy to see from the farm operators' attention to detail and creative touches, why it was awarded "Taiwan Leisure Farm of Excellence" title by the Taiwanese Leisure Farming Development Association.

Add: No. 271, Youche Lane, Changchun Village, Huatan Township, Changhua County
Tel: (04) 786 0779   Website: www.schun.com.tw/

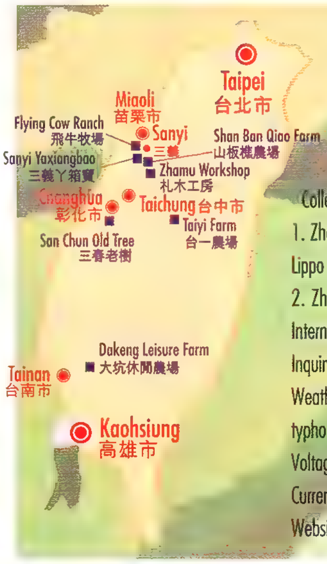
DIY Wooden Ducks

Sanyi Yaxiangbao

Visitors to Sanyi, the home of wood-carving are bound to hear the stories about this Shuangfeng wooden duck factory. Wooden ducks were initially made as decoys for hunters. Ducks would often be lured by the sight of the swaying wooden duck. But these days, the intricately carved and hand painted wooden ducks are collectors' items. They brought the first orders to the factory. But due to various external factors, the factory changed its strategy from 2002 and is now Sanyi Yaxiangbao.

The exquisite store does not only sell handmade wooden ducks and other birds, but there's also a large workshop nearby, the workshop is open all year round, it accommodates up to 80 people at a time making ducks. NT$200 includes materials and instructions. You'll be taken through each of the steps, the well laid out workshop means that whether you're young or old, you can unleash your creativity and create your very own wooden duck.

Add: No.176, Zhonghe Rd, Miaoli County, Sanyi Township
Tel: (37) 872 076   Website: www.dp-duckdiy.com.tw
Activities: DIY wooden duck, NT$200/ person (includes materials and instructions)



Travel Tips

Flights: There are numerous flights from Hong Kong to Taipei

Visas: Holders of SAR or BNO passports who are born in Hong Kong can apply for entry permits to Taiwan via the Internet.

Website: nas.immigration.gov.tw   Fees: HK$55

Collection of visa (presence of electronic receipt, passport and ID card):

1. Zhong Hua Travel Service Add: 4/F (40/F for foreigners) Tower One, Lippo Centre, 89 Admiralty Rd, Central, H.K.

2. Zhong Hua Travel Service office at the Departure Hall of Hong Kong International Airport

Inquiry: 2525 8316-8

Weather: Taiwan's summers last from June to August, it is hot with occasional typhoons

Voltage: 110V, two-prong (flat) plugs

Currency: 1 Hong Kong dollar is approximately NT$3.9

Website of Taiwan Tourism Bureau: www.taiwan.net.tw

Colourful Masks

Shan Ban Qiao

Lin Wenyuan and Peng Feiyu, the owners of the Shan Ban Qiao Farm mask cultural studio, used to grow Makino bamboo and rice for a living, but now run the farm that's a mix of wood carving studio and leisure. The couple has been making wood-carvings for over 10 years, they use local materials as Sanyi is the home of wood-carving. The farm is fenced in with precious timbers like Taiwan cedar, Taiwan fir, rosewood; pickets divide the timbers, adding to the down to earth feel.

But the outbreak of SARS meant tourists stayed away, so the couple and their children decided to paint their beloved Peking opera faces onto the wood carved masks. They set up the "mask cultural studio" so others would appreciate the beauty in Peking opera masks, or even create their own designs. The husband and wife team teaches in the farm from beginners onwards. The walls of the workshop are filled with masks painted from real performance masks, with descriptions of the roles that the masks represent. To make your own wood carved mask, all you have to do is draw according to the mask design, then paint on the colours. The two-hour process will give you more insights about masks, it's also a test of your patience and willpower.

Add: No.138, Shuanglian Tan, Miaoli County, Sanyi Township
Tel: (37) 875 766
Website: www.olife.com.tw/feller.htm
Activity: DIY mask NT$299/ person; more activities like firefly eco-talks from April-October
Accommodation: NT$350

1. Sanchun Laoshu farm has an al-fresco café and restaurant, why not try a cup of coffee?

2. Crafted wooden ducks are a common sight in the store.

3. The hosts had spent three years making the 1,000-more masks at the farm.

4. All decorations at Zhamu Workshop were made by the owner - you won't miss the large wood carvings placed outside the store.

Art of Wood-Carving

Zhamu Workshop

If you're a fan of wood carving, you must not miss Zhamu Workshop.

This triangular courtyard building used to be wood carving artist Lin Jinchang's workshop, where he kept displays of his award-wining works. But then he founded Zhamu Workshop — to allow more people to learn wood carving and experience life in the mountains, hoping to promote the art like the name "Zhamu" suggests - to extend one's roots. He designed the DIY wood carving activities, like making cute wooden dolls from small branches. He also built another five Japanese style suites, so more people can get a taste of life here. ⊂

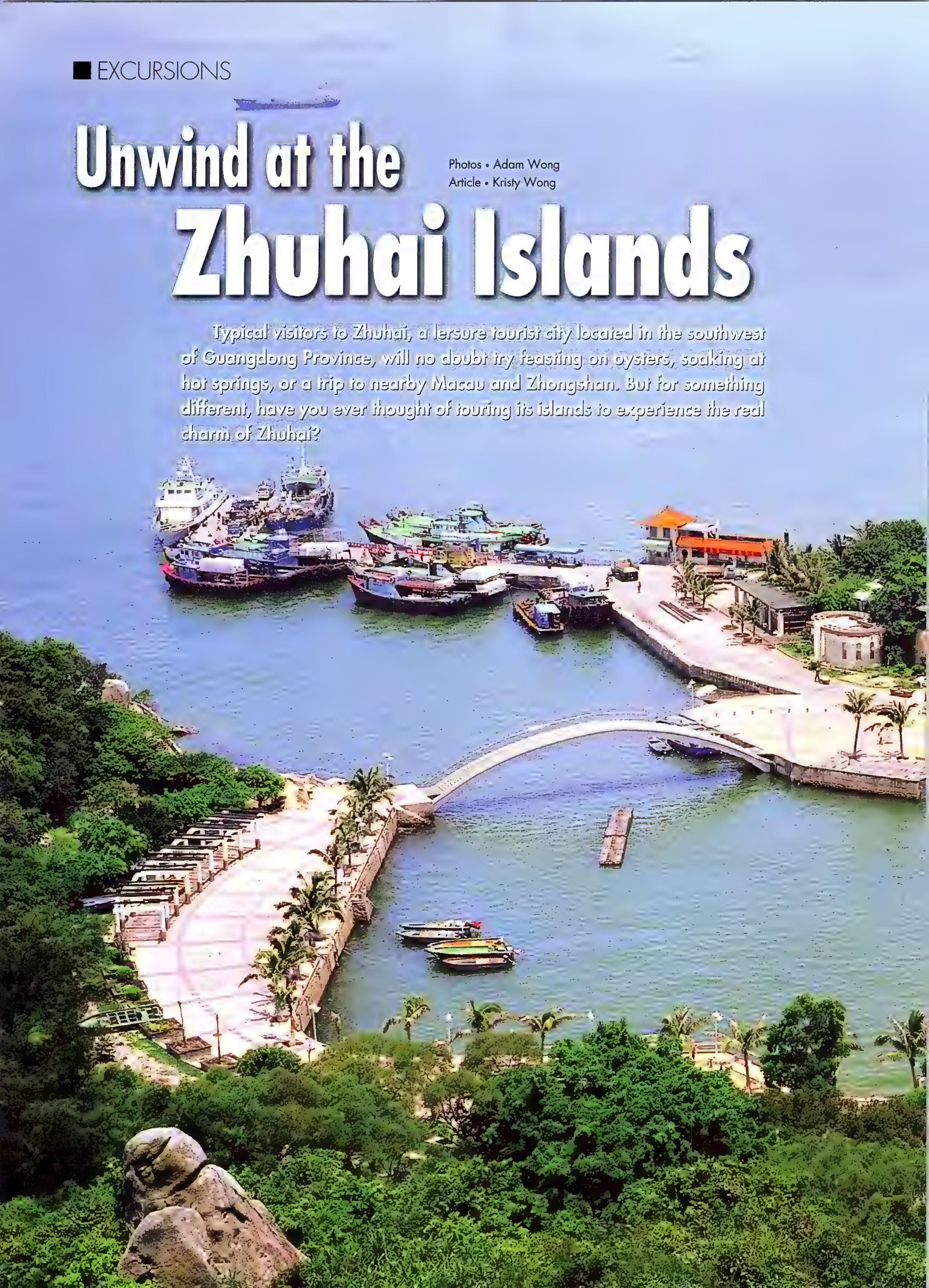
Translated by Cheng Lei

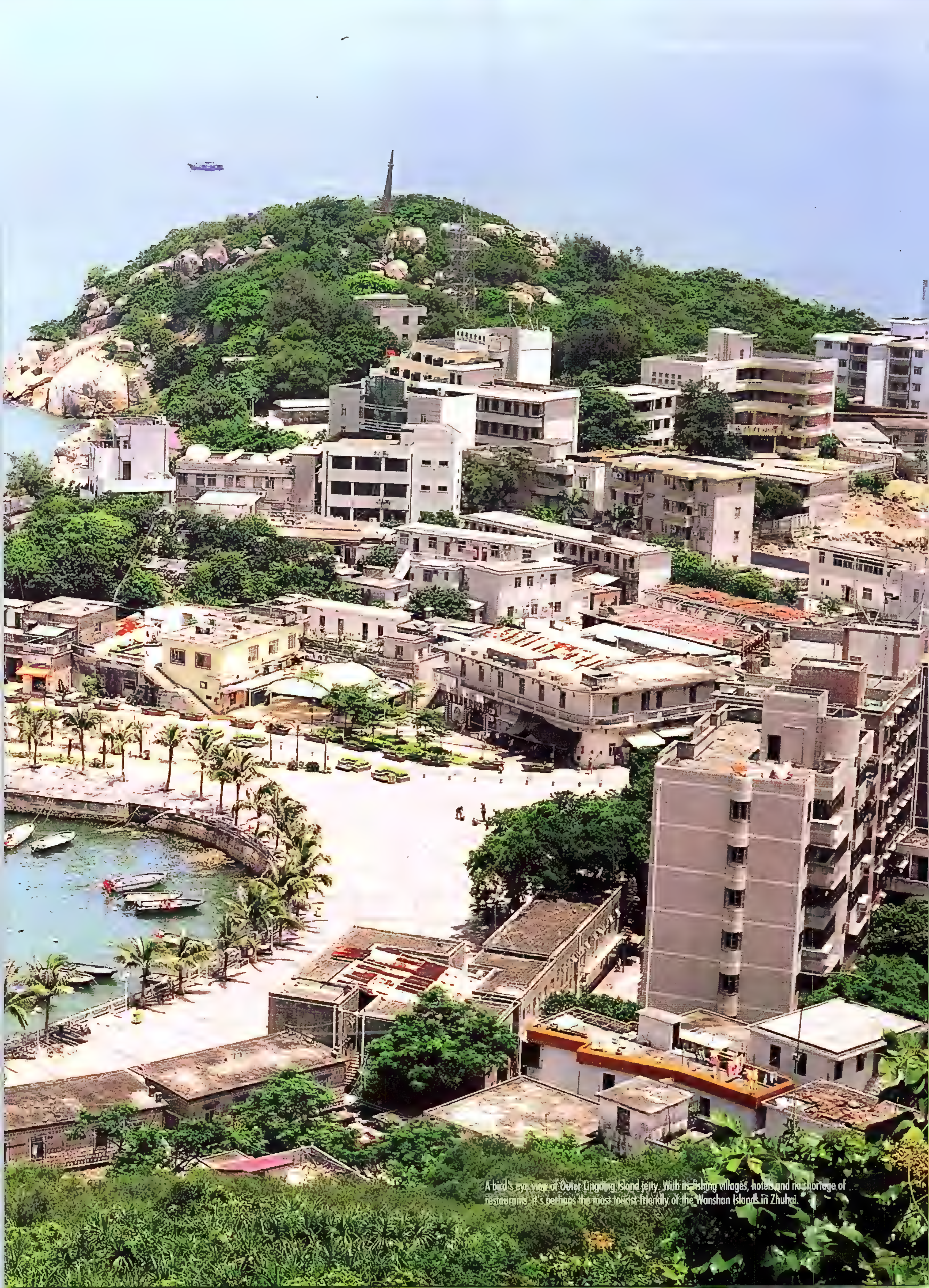
Add: No.1~5, foot of the Bengshan Mountain, Shuangtan Village, Miaoli County, Sanyi Township
Tel: (37) 872 274
Website: www.zhamu.idv.tw
Activities: DIY wooden doll, NT$250/ person (including wood, paint and packaging)
Accommodation: Quadruple Japanese suites, NT$2,000 (normal season)

Unwind at the Zhuhai Islands

Photos • Adam Wong
Article • Kristy Wong

Typical visitors to Zhuhai, a leisure tourist city located in the southwest of Guangdong Province, will no doubt try feasting on oysters, soaking at hot springs, or a trip to nearby Macau and Zhongshan. But for something different, have you ever thought of touring its islands to experience the real charm of Zhuhai?





A bird's eye view of Outer Lingding Island jetty. With its fishing villages, hotels and no shortage of restaurants, it's perhaps the most tourist-friendly of the Wanshan Islands in Zhuhai.

Outer Lingding Island

It's so easy to become wrapped up our busy lives, so when we get the chance to get away even for a day or two, it really is a blessing in disguise.

One day, a friend said he'd show me the real Zhuhai and "recharge" my batteries at the same time. It wasn't until I got to Xiangzhou Port that I realized he meant a visit to the Zhuhai Islands.

After reading the travel brochure about the islands, I couldn't wait to see all the sights. It had been a long time since I'd been out to sea, so even though I was a little seasick, I was still mesmerized by the changing colours of the sea — muddy yellow, green, and then blue. Maybe I have what it takes to lead an islander lifestyle?

Lonely No More

After an hour and a half, we arrived at the Outer Lingding Island, so called because it is on the outskirts of the Lingding Sea. If you think the island is lonely (Lingding means lonely in Chinese), judging by the number of tourists like me — grinning ear to ear with excitement and curiosity, the island has a sizeable fan base. Outer Lingding Island takes up about 4.23 sq km in area, or about a third of Hong Kong's third largest island Lamma Island. Surprisingly, the island is only about 11 nautical miles from Tsim Sha Tsui ferry dock in Hong Kong. There's no shortage of things to do on Lingding Island — the mountain and the sea offer plenty of options. Since we're here, we thought we'd try everything on offer.

Up, Down, All Around Lingding

In the summer heat, it made sense to hire a mini-bus to take us up the mountain. At the top of the mountain lies Lingding Peak (A). By passing through several "slivers of sky" — narrow and damp gaps between rocks, one finally reaches the 311.8-metre high Lingding Peak to check out the "Wanshan Chess Match" — a string of islands. Standing on these huge rocks of fantastic shapes, we followed the guide's directions to spot other islands, including Hong Kong's Lantau Island. He said one could even see the Tsing Ma Bridge in Hong Kong on a clear day.

If you're up to it, you can walk up the 1,200 stone steps on Jingwan Road to reach the sandy beaches of Dadong Bay (B). We chose to take the speedboat around the island which left from a jetty next to

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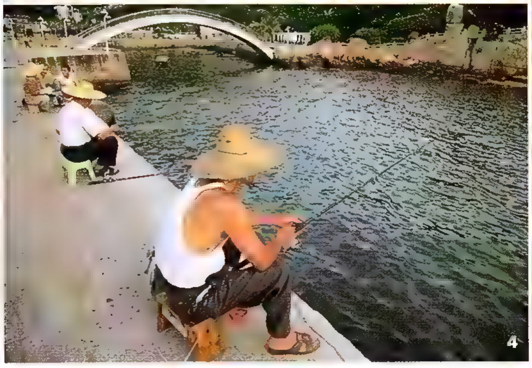
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1. There is a natural maze of huge stones from the middle to the top of the mountain, tourists can marvel at the bay's magnificent views at the top.

2. This "sliver of sky" nearly "squashes" everyone.

3. During the off fishing season (June 1 to July 31 every year), islanders like to make these iron nests to catch fishes.

4. The locals lead leisurely lives - they love a spot of fishing.

5. How would you like to try these football sized wild pineapples?

Shiyong Bay and within 10 minutes we were at Dadong Bay. The two young deckhands took us for a walk on the beach, pointing out the direction to Hong Kong's Lamma Island. If it wasn't for the sea separating us from Hong Kong, it would be easier to take a boat from here to Lamma Island than going to Xiangzhou Port. Dadong Bay is a quaint corner of the island surrounded by verdant wild forests and I imagine it would be a great swimming beach if there were facilities like regular boat services and change rooms. Then the deckhands took us to see a field of wild pineapples. The golden fruit were the size of footballs! We picked some to take pictures of and taste, unfortunately they were exactly the opposite of sweet and juicy.

Sunset By Lingding Sea

Outer Lingding Island also has a "Lovers' Road", which you can get to from both north and south sides of the island. If you take the south side, you'll soon see "stone engravings on the cliff" (C) of the "Passing through the Lingding Sea" poem by patriotic hero Wen Tianxiang carved in the style Mao Zedong's calligraphy. Wen Tianxiang defied the threats and persuasion tactics of the Mongolian Yuan dynasty rulers and was ordered to be executed in the capital city (today's Beijing). Later Mao Zedong hand-copied the poem to honour Wen's patriotism and inspire later generations.

A stroll on "Lovers' Road" at dusk is utterly romantic. The sun's last rays colour the entire Lingding Sea in a brilliant crimson glow. This "lovers' road" is undulating, unlike the flat and smooth one in Zhuhai city, emulating the highs and lows of love. But thankfully the area is sparsely populated — only a few tourists linger to capture the glorious sunset on film, or sit on the huge rocks, enjoying the quiet and privacy of such a tranquil setting.

Live Like an Islander

Dinner at an al fresco seafood restaurant was a pleasant surprise — we didn't expect such delicious and reasonably priced seafood in the off season, including well-known shellfish delicacies such as general's hat and dog's paw conch. The yacht club hotel where we stayed (D) was very close to the jetty and rooms enjoyed sea views. The second morning, we decided to take advantage of our location and have an early morning swim at the nearby Shiyong Bay (E). I may have only been on the island less than 24 hours, but I was already living the enviable life of the islanders.

The History of Wen Tianxiang

A national hero from in the late southern Song Dynasty, Wen Tianxiang (1236—1282) was the Song Dynasty's top ranking scholar and prime minister. In 1275, Wen Tianxiang organized volunteer resistance forces in Fujian, Jiangxi, Guangdong and other places to defend China against the Yuan army that was trying to conquer the south. He was captured after a defeat in Guangdong in 1278. The Yuan army transferred Wen Tianxiang by boat through the Linding Sea in a bid to persuade another branch of his army to surrender. When the boat was about to enter the Lingding Sea, the Yuan soldiers shouted "Lingding Sea is up ahead, watch out for the waves". Struck by the turbulent motion of the boat, Wen Tianxiang was inspired to write the now famous "Passing Through the Lingding Sea".

Guishan Island

When we went onshore at Guishan Island, the first thing that caught our attention was a European style building which turned out to be the Customs Building. This island may be only three nautical miles away from Hong Kong's Lantau Island, but it's made up of three islets. It is an important political and economic centre for the Wanshan marine development pilot zone and a key thoroughfare for ships to the mouth of the Pearl River.

What's In A Name?

You might not know it, but the People's Liberation Army fought its first marine battle, the "Wanshan Naval Battle" in the areas around Guishan Island. Orriginally called "La Ji Wei (Rubbish End) Island", the island was landed upon by the "Battleship Guishan" (A) and from then on the island was known as "Guishan (Osmanthus Mountain) Island".

The guide first took us to Guishan lighthouse. On the May 22 this year, China's Postal Bureau issued a

series of four special "modern lighthouses" stamps, one of which features the Guishan Lighthouse. Its proximity to the main sea route to Guangzhou gives it a special role in the booming "Pearl River Delta" economy.

Trenches Gone Batty

If you're a fan of war movies like "Platoon", don't miss the Guishan military camp and trenches on

Xiaodong Mountain (B). These trenches take up around 200 ~ 300 square metres and have not been used since former Chinese leader Deng Xiaoping cut back the army. The summer camp is a top choice for young people to receive military training — there are hoops, bars and other training facilities, as well as a dormitory for about 20 people.

We checked out the trenches accompanied by the guide. It was very cool and wet inside — the temperature was a far cry from the 30°C heat outside and there was condensation on the walls. Every few steps, there were slogans from Mao Zedong Thought in red on the walls, giving the place a very communist and revolutionary feel. My friend shouted "those who have walked in the same trenches are friends" his voice amplified in perfect surround-sound. Even more surprising, the caves at the end of the trenches were full of bats, so many of them I could hardly see.

Lamb Cries on Xiaodong Mountain

Away from the trenches and military camp so reminiscent of battles, peace can be found at the Xiaodong Mountain Eco-Park next door, with a football field sized fishpond. Even if you're not an angler, spending an afternoon in the beautiful surroundings and enjoying the flowers in bloom makes for a relaxing afternoon. There are also peacocks, cobras and sheep to be found in the Eco-Park. The occasional lamb bleating sounds curiously like a baby's crying echoing in the forest. We couldn't help but chuckle.

Fish Farm Fun

We left Xiaodong Mountain and drove back to the jetty, stopping to look at some fishing rafts (D) by the side of Lover's Road. After taking a quick step onto the boats out of curiosity we got off the boat and entered one of the fish farms. The owner of the fish farm told us he has 60 nets and most of his fish are destined for Hong Kong. We saw some grouper fish about half to a kilogram in weight, but the farmer told us they were not ready to eat until the end of the year when they reach 5 kilos.

Mr Liang told us that one net-full of fish can sell for about 300,000 yuan, which seemed to indicate that all the fishermen were very well off. "But it's just as easy to make a loss too!" He explained that if the fish became sick, or if the crimson tide hits, the fish farm owner could end up with nothing. It's true that everyone who makes a living off the sea has to bear with instability and hardship. That's why the two months in the off-season provide the fishermen and fish with a good break. Our guide told us that they are now starting to organize fishery tours, so more tourists can come and experience the joys of fishing, and maybe help bring a little extra income for the fishermen.

1. Guishan Island Lighthouse is rather famous, it even appears as part of the new "modern lighthouses" stamp series from the State Postal Bureau. (by Kristy Wong)

2. The "lavish" customs building on Guishan Island (on right) is eye-catching.

3. At Wen Tianxiang Square (C) — with its back to Beishan Mountain, a statue of this patriot and poet stands towards the sea with his sword.

4. Guishan Island was formerly named "Rubbish End Island", its name changed after the Guishan ship landed here. The picture is of where the Guishan ship first landed, at the southeast of the island. (by Kristy Wong)

5. Slogans from the revolution period can still be found in these trenches in Xiaodong Mountain.

6. Fish farming is another part of the fishermen's livelihood — aside from fishing at sea.

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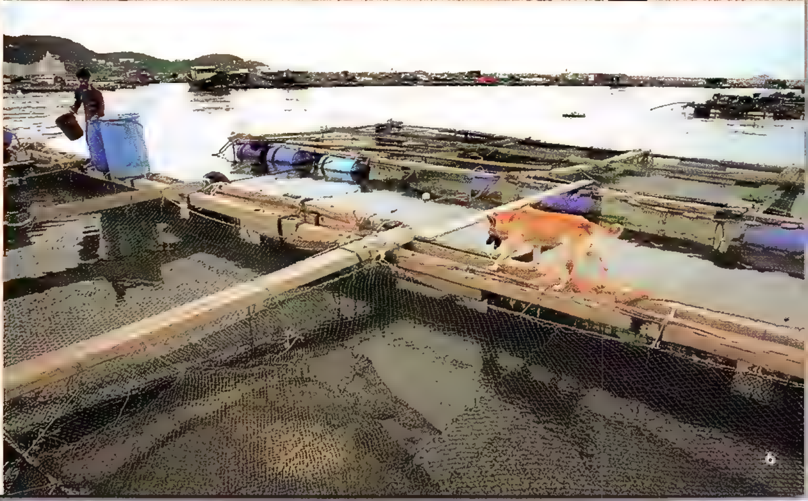
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Wanshan Island

On the way to the island, my friend had reminisced to me about his childhood on the island, but considering this was the only time I had spent on so many islands, it was a little hard to conjure up exactly what he was describing. "Fishing village" had always just been a word to me. It wasn't until we reached Wanshan Island (Island of Ten Thousand Mountains), that I really got a sense of island life.

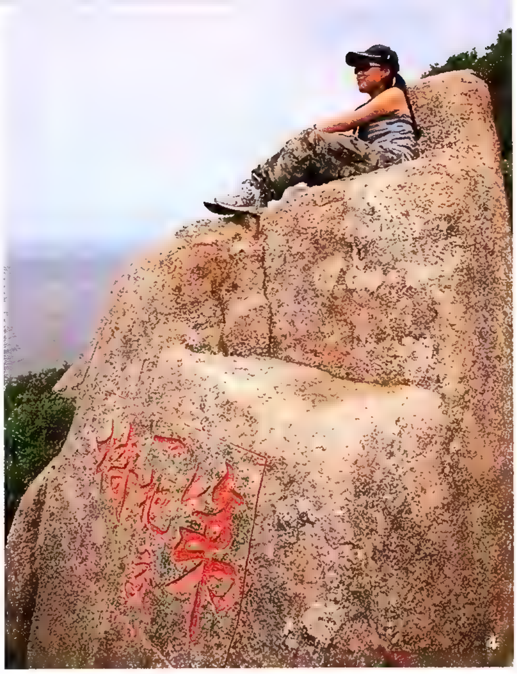
Thrilling Boat Ride To Lesser Wanshan

Wanshan Island is divided into Greater Wanshan and Lesser Wanshan, the former has deep water of over 30 metres, hence no beaches. The guide said that Small Wanshan has a small beach (A) which the locals love to visit by small boat, so we took the plunge and boarded the speedboat to Lesser Wanshan Island. While the waves weren't as high as the day before, every time the boat crashed into one we seemed to jump about one metre or more into the air.

Even before we had reached the shore, a family of four dogs had already come to wait for us. Being fond of dogs, I was not at all worried and the dogs were friendly enough to lead us to the quiet yet charming small Wanshan beach. Fortunately the beach hasn't really been discovered yet, otherwise it may become something like Sai Kung's Half Moon Bay in Hong Kong.

"Nothing Much To See Here"

My friend and I walked along Gangwan Road (or Harbour Road, same as the one in Wan Chai in Chinese) and it wasn't long before we saw a Tianhou (Goddess of the Sea) Temple (B). A child stood calmly at the door, telling us in Mandarin he was seven years old and guards the temple with his grandmother. The old woman was from Chaozhou, the same as my friend. The temple was 150 years old and every year on 23rd day of the third lunar month there would be huge celebration performance here. I asked her if there were any fun things to do or things to see on Wanshan Island - to which she casually replied "Well there's nothing



much to see here!" My heart sank when I heard it… am I just going to walk around the island?

Simple Island Life

When we got to Shanbian Lane, we saw all the families were knitting or mending fishing nets — while it may be off-season now, the islanders were not idle, but actively preparing their tools for the next season.

After striking up a conversation with them, we discovered that they had built these stone houses themselves. We asked who lived there now? An old woman smiled and said they are all empty now. Because less Hong Kong people buy deep sea fish from here, many of the fishermen had moved out. Said one old lady: "After Hong Kong's hang over (handover) the fish business has gone down." This was followed by "if it weren't off-season, there'd be many bulls (boats) at the jetty!" I was most fascinated listening to her local version of Cantonese.

Girl From The City

We were told there was a hotel on the mountain and sure enough found it a few minutes later. It had a quaint name — Fushiwan (Floating Rock Bay) Villa (C). A young girl called Xiao Fang greeted us and showed us the accommodation. Xiao Fang was from the Gongbei District of Zhuhai and even though she had just graduated from high school, she showed a maturity and confidence beyond her years. She said she likes the quiet life on the island.

… perhaps Wanshan Island is not as exciting as Outer Lingding and Guishan, but its quiet charms are like some subtle herbs — to be savoured slowly.

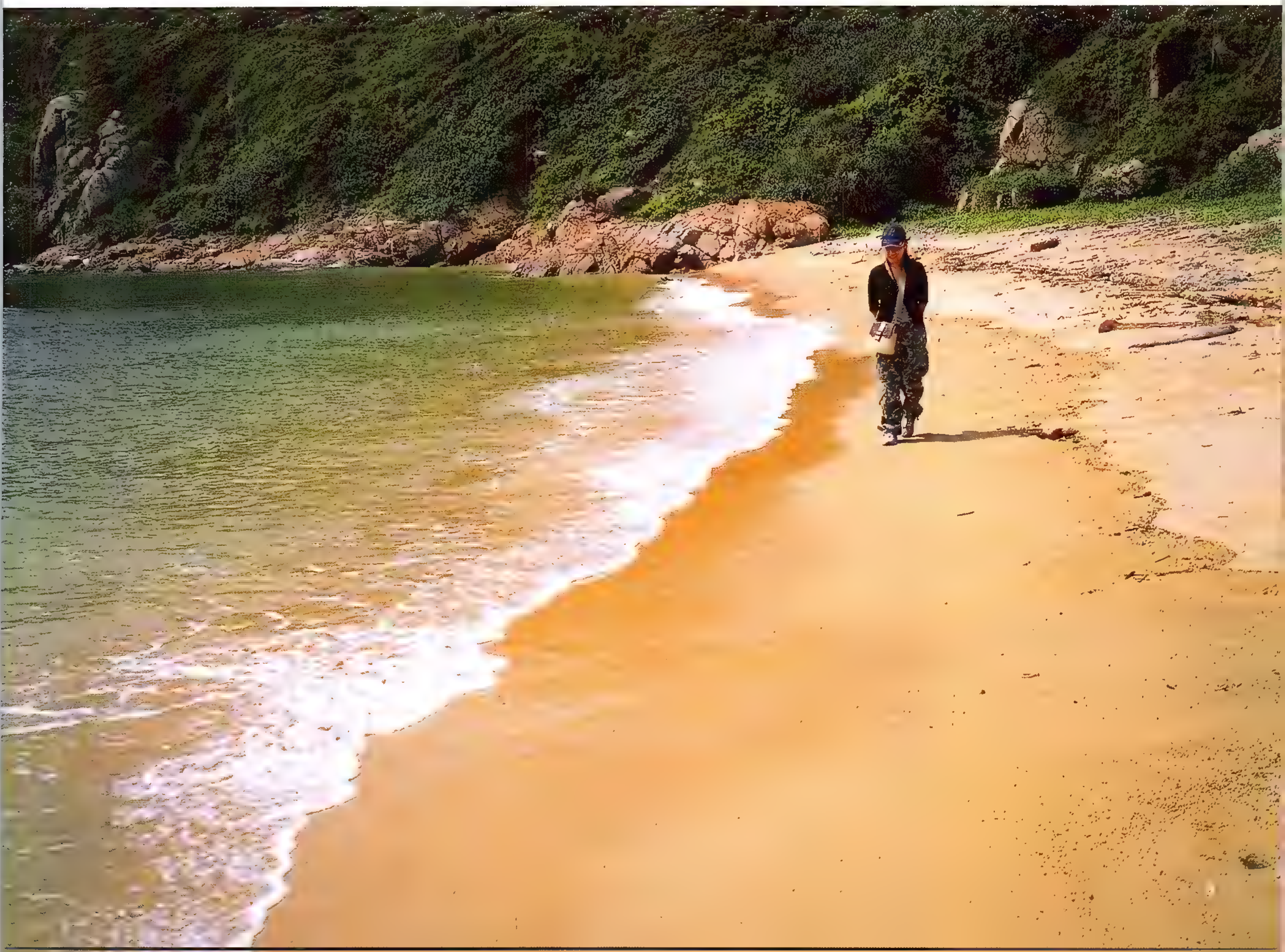
1. The fishermen on the island leave fish out to dry on sunny days.

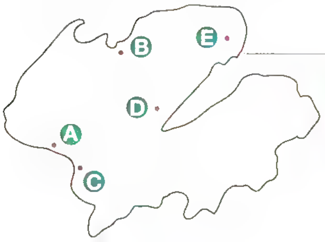
2. Fushiwan Lodge gives a panoramic view of Wanshan.

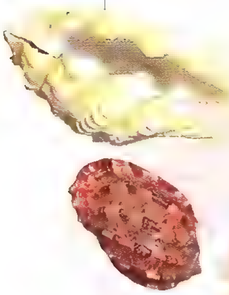
3. Wanshan Island is divided into Great Wanshan and Small Wanshan, there is no beach at Great Wanshan because the water is too deep there — over 30 metres.

4. On the way to the Wanshan Peak (D) there are many fantastically shaped rocks, one of them is like being in the king's throne.

5. Taking a stroll along the Lesser Wanshan beach is a great way to unwind.







Dong'ao Island

Dong'ao Island was the last stop on our trip. I fell seasick in the short 45 minutes boat ride and had to be "helped" off by my friend in a daze. But the postcard perfect surroundings quickly invigorated me. Located in the centre of the Wanshan Islands, Dong'ao Island is about 4.62 sq km in size and is the favourite island to visit among young Zhuhai residents.

Nansha Bay — Pearl Of The Island

Dong'ao Island features two beaches — Nansha (Southern Sand) Bay (A) and Dazhu (Big Bamboo) Bay (B) — and Nansha Bay which is known as "Diamond Beach" is particularly worth visiting. It is without a doubt the prettiest beach I saw on the trip and beckons the traveller to jump into the water as soon as one sees it. Perhaps that's why after the May Labour Day holidays, Dong'ao Island added diving to its host of recreation options.

Walking in the lush green forests feels a little like walking at Big Wave Bay in Saikung in Hong Kong. Soon we arrived at our lodgings (C), the elegant rooms faced Nansha Bay — another heavenly touch. In the afternoon we walked to a nearby fishing village (D) with our guide, the villagers were full of chatter and laughter, I began to ease into the relaxed lifestyle too.

A "Rocking" Good Time At The Seaside

Since it was not hard walking up the hills on Dong'ao Island, we made our way slowly along the coastline, while the guide told us about the names of the huge rocks — such as Fengdong Rock (Wind-blown Rock), spaceman, Peking Man — truly, the prowess and artfulness of nature is astounding. The variety of plants like wild pineapples, palm leaves, cactus, morning glory and other wild flowers I didn't know the names of added colour and romance to the island. Further up the mountain, we arrived at the patrol post and the remains of a fortress (E) built in the Qianlong period of the Qing Dynasty. It is also a good place to look out onto General's Rock and imagine the war torn days of years gone by.

On the second morning, my friend bought some dumplings and bananas for me, so I'd have a full stomach and wouldn't get seasick. This would be the last leg of my Zhuhai islands journey and I stuffed the dumplings into my mouth, but my friend said "Take it easy, there's no need to hurry". I felt a little embarrassed — to hurry seems to be the habit of the harassed city dweller. We are used to eat as fast as we can. In fact, we can and should live without haste.

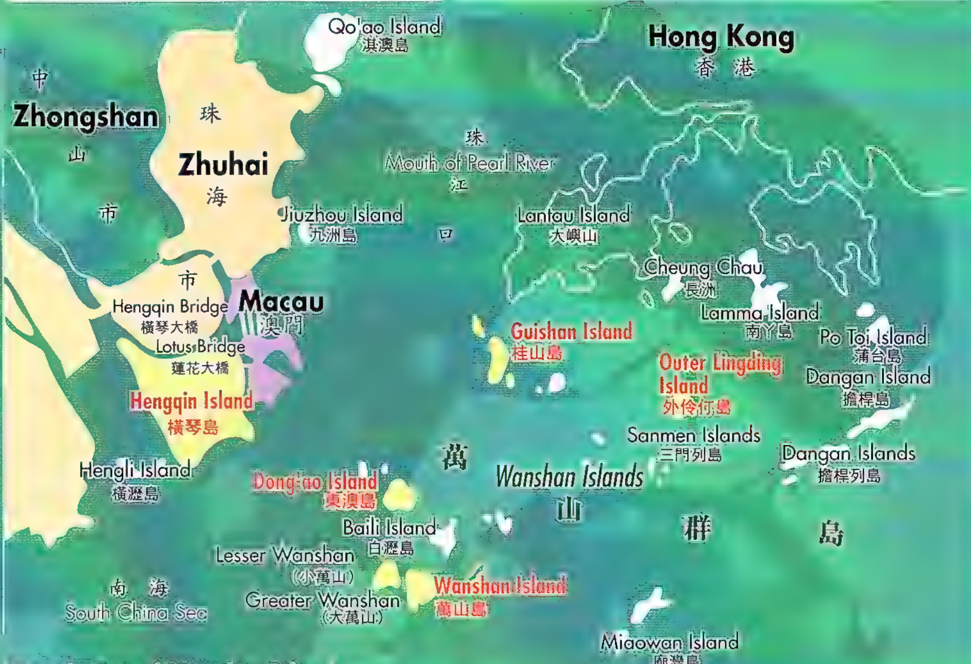
It's often said that sometimes happiness is only experienced in retrospect.

On the way back, I recalled and savoured details from my island journey, it made me realize a leisurely pace doesn't mean boring — in fact this easy way of living is a kind of happiness.

1,2. Dong'ao Island boasts lots of beautiful plants

3. The tranquil fishing village on the island

Wanshan Islands Travel Tips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淇澳島
Hong Kong
香港
中
Zhongshan
山
市
珠
Zhuhai
海
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珠
江
口
Jiuzhou Island
九洲島
Lantau Island
大嶼山
Cheung Chau
長洲
Macau
澳門
Hengqin Bridge
橫琴大橋
Lotus Bridge
蓮花大橋
Hengqin Island
橫琴島
Guishan Island
桂山島
Lamma Island
南丫島
Po Toi Island
蒲台島
Outer Lingding Island
外伶仃島
Dangan Island
擔桿島
Sanmen Islands
三門列島
Dangan Islands
擔桿列島
Hengli Island
橫瀝島
Dong'ao Island
東澳島
萬
Wanshan Islands
山
群
島
Baili Island
白瀝島
Lesser Wanshan
(小萬山)
Greater Wanshan
(大萬山)
Wanshan Island
萬山島
南海
South China Sea
Miaowan Island
廟灣島

Distribution of Wanshan Islands

Hong Kong — Zhuhai

There are 28 daily boat services from Jiuzhou Port Terminal to Hong Kong's China-Hong Kong City (Tsim Sha Tsui) and Hong Kong-Macau Ferry Terminal (Sheung Wan's Shun Tak Centre) ; there are also 52 services between Shenzhen's Shekou Port and Jiuzhou Port. The boat ride takes around 70 minutes.

Hong Kong ticketing hotline: (852) 2858 [illegible]

Jiuzhou Port ticketing hotline: (756) 333 3359, [illegible]

Websit: www. jzportpt.com

Zhuhai — Xiangzhou Port

Depart for the four main islands from Xiangzhou Port in the northeast of Zhuhai, which can be reached by getting off at the last stop of the No [illegible] or 56 bus.

Xiangzhou Port Beidi Ferry Terminal: (756) 211 9915, 211 [illegible]

Outer Lingding Island

Transport: Xiangzhou Port — Outer Lingding Island

Xiangzhou — Guishan, Outer Lingding 8: 40/14: 30

Outer Lingding — Guishan, Xiangzhou 10: 30/16: 20

Ferry (single trip): 82 yuan

Outer Lingding Terminal: (756)885 5317

Accommodation:

1. Longtao Yacht Club Hotel

Add: No.2, Qingfeng Jing, Outer Lingding Island

Tel: (756) 885 5556 Fax: (756) 885 5557

Speciality: The only three-star hotel on the island, one side of it faces the jetty. Water sports are catered for, like diving, canoeing, speedboats, barbeques are available for hire.

Website: www.longtaohotel.com

2. Xiangsilin (Russian) Resort

Add: Middle of hill, Outer Lingding Island

Tel: (756) 885 5133 Fax: (756) 885 5136

Speciality: Most of the resort consists of timber Russian style villas, most offer uninterrupted views of the Lingding Sea and the Sanmen islands, also has saltwater pool.

Diving: 200 yuan/ hour

Pan-island tour by speedboat: 300 yuan/ 30 mins (per 10 people)

Website: www.xiangsilin.com

Food: Outer Lingding Island's seafood "three delicacies" — sea urchins, dog paw conch and general's hat (a kind of shell)

Guishan Island

Transport: Xiangzhou Port — Guishan Island

Jianghua No.3	08: 20	Xiangzhou — Guishan
	10: 45	Guishan — Xiangzhou
Dongqu No.2	14: 30	Xiangzhou — Guishan
	16: 45	Guishan — Xiangzhou
Dongqu No.1	16: 30	Xiangzhou — Guishan
	08: 45	Guishan — Xiangzhou

Ferry (single-trip): 68 yuan

Guishan Terminal: (756) 885 1512

Transport on the island: direct Xiaodong Mountain bus (to Guishan hotels and meeting place for island tour)

Accommodation:

1. Guishan Hotel (two star)

Tel: (756) 885 1125/1126 Fax: (756) 885 1127

Website: www.123gs.com

Double room: 280 yuan

Xiangsilin (Russian) Resort

Dog's Paw Conch

A world through the fishing net

A view from Marina Club hotel

[illegible]

[illegible]

Wanshan Island

Transport: Xiangzhou Port — Wanshan Island

Xiangzhou — Dong'ao, Wanshan 09: 45

Wanshan — Dong'ao, Xiangzhou 12: 40

Ferry: 78 yuan

Wanshan Terminal: (756) 885 6429

Boat to small Wanshan Island-around 200 yuan

Accommodation:

Fushiwan Lodging Tel: (756) 885 6000

Double room: 128 yuan Karaoke: 38 yuan/ hour

Speciality: situated mid-hill, affords panoramic view of Wanshan, offers free transfers to and from the jetty, as well as boat ticket reservations.

Wanshan Islands Tourist Website: www.wanshantown.com

Dong'ao Island

Transport: Xiangzhou Port — Dong'ao Island

Dong'ao — Xiangzhou 13: 00

Dong'ao — Wanshan 10: 30

Ferry (single-trip): 66 yuan

Dong'ao Terminal: (756) 885 8100

Transport on the Island: green mini-buses travel up the mountain, each journey costs 10 yuan, it's about a 20 minute walk to Nansha Bay.

Accommodation:

1. Nansha Bay Resort Villas

Panoramic suites cost only 250 ~ 300 yuan, each villa is named after a flower, like Peony, Hibiscus.

2. Marina Club: managed by the Jiuzhou group, opened in 1999, rooms cost 420 ~ 450 yuan.

* Rent "flyboats" from local fishermen to travel between the islands at other times or go out to sea, usually 100 ~ 200 yuan for half an hour.

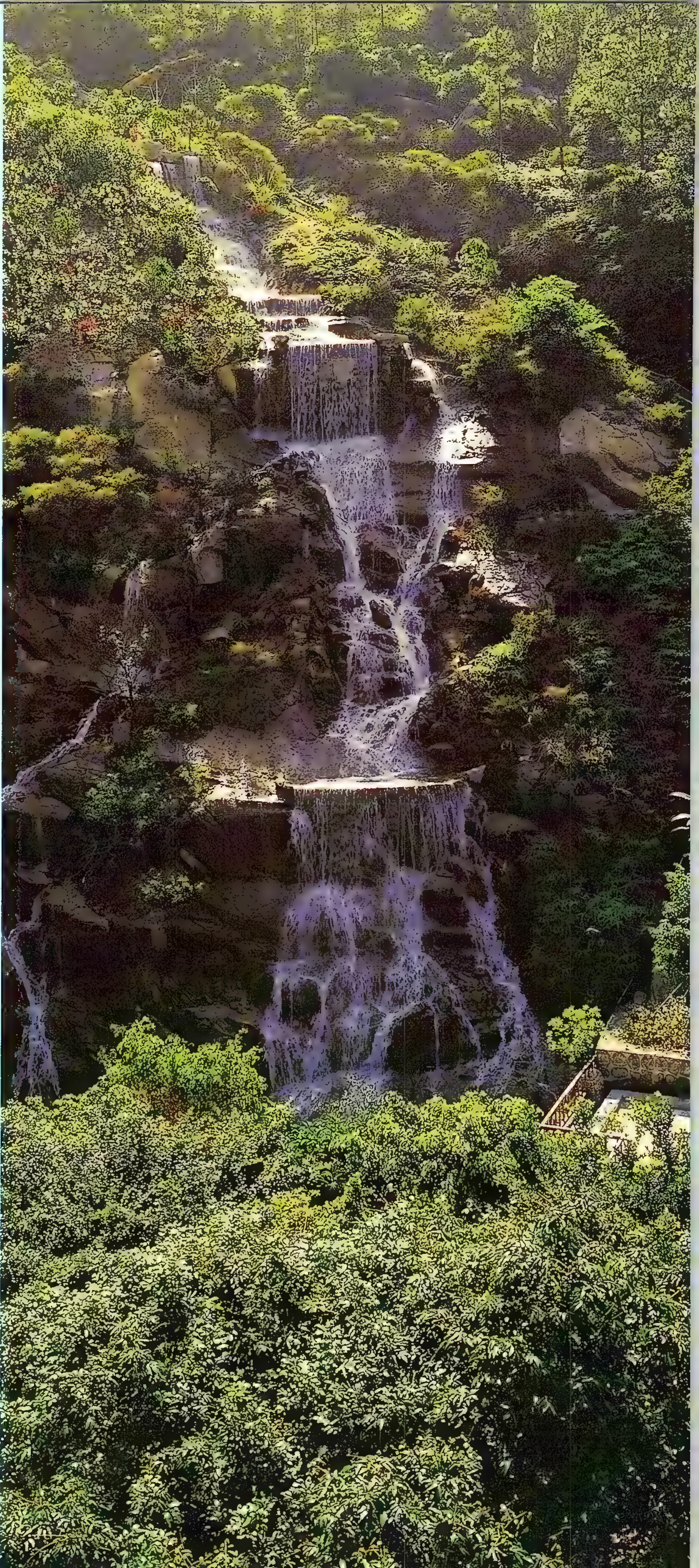
* Try to avoid China's public holidays (like Chinese New Year, May 1, and October 1 holidays), because the islands are likely to receive four to five times more tourists, hotels are usually be fully booked.

Hengqin Island

— The Last Sanctuary in Zhuhai

Photos & Article • Adam Wong

Hengqin Island is the largest of the 146 islands in Zhuhai. With 76 km of coastline and a total area of 86 sq km, the island is about three times the size of Macau. But only 700 people live on the island, which has left it with a well-preserved environment. To me, this is a rare "unspoilt sanctuary" in the city.



1. Tianhu - not far from Sandie Springs, also has awe-inspiring waterfalls.

2. Visitors can indulge in healthy and tasty rustic fare in the coolness of the bamboo bushes, then walk up the mountain path, finally to dive into the different sized pools.

3. Brilliant coloured wild flowers push their way out of the stone crevices.

4. Sandie Springs are magnificent to hear as they are to watch.

5. Big pineapples can be found in the park.

6. Facilities like the man-made beach and barbeque area are a hit with the local tourists.

Nature's Symphony — Sandie Springs

There are five main attractions in the Hengqin economic zone — Sandie Springs, Tianhu Paradise, Oyster Ecological Park, Stone Garden, Ocean Paradise, and Orient (Zhuhai) Sports Resort World — enough to satisfy even the most demanding visitor.

One step into Sandiequan (Three-fold Springs) and one is drawn into its all-encompassing beauty.

After travelling around the world, I thought I was beyond being moved by another tourist sight, but this was almost an otherworldly oasis — hidden behind dense bamboo forests rushing mountain streams plunged from the hill, gushing into the pools at the foot of the mountain, where groups of young people swam or splashed around in joyous laughter...

Hard to imagine this used to be uninhabited wasteland — until eight years ago when a local entrepreneur named Zhong had the prescience to invest here. Now it has been listed as one of Guangdong's Must Visit Five Sights by the Beijing Foreign Language Press's "Panoramic China" book. It is also the favourite holiday destination for Zhuhai locals.

We climbed the steps of the 458-metre-high Naobei Mountain, marveling at the view each step of the way, realizing how much Sandie Springs resembles a three-dimensional landscape watercolour — with bold splashes of ink, as well as inspired strokes, but none of it is contrived. There is soul and strength in those massive rocks, some are craggy, others seem to be deep in thought, or ready for flight... who says that stones are inanimate and lifeless?

Waterfalls and streams are the soul of Sandie Springs. Streams ooze out of stone crevices, ribbons of water joining together, to pour forth into roaring torrents, finally cascading, tumbling, plunging from the mountain top. In contrast, the natural pools on the mountain are serene and no less magical. They are like nectar bestowed from the gods, trickling from the close embrace of the mountain rocks. Then there are the crystal clear mountain streams you can see right to the bottom of — as well as the small fish that swim happily in it. I gave in to the temptation of such bliss and made like a fish myself — leaping into the cool waters...

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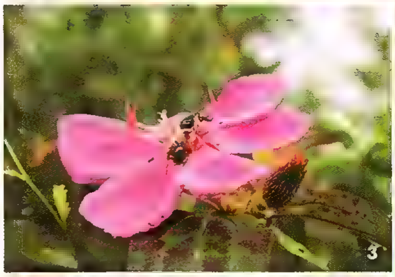

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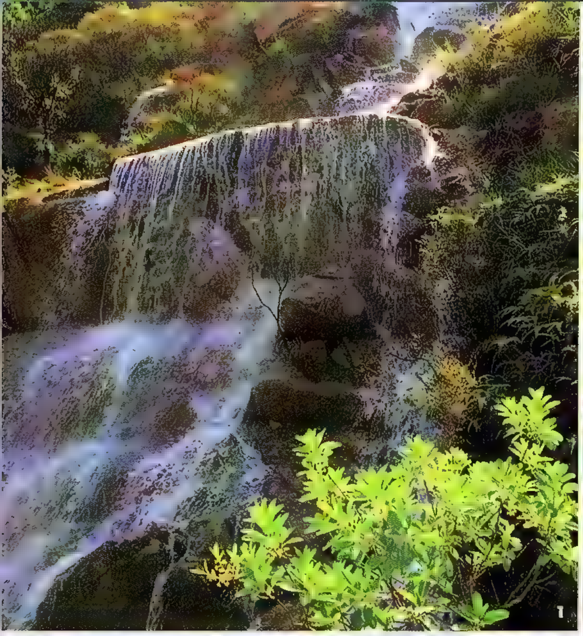
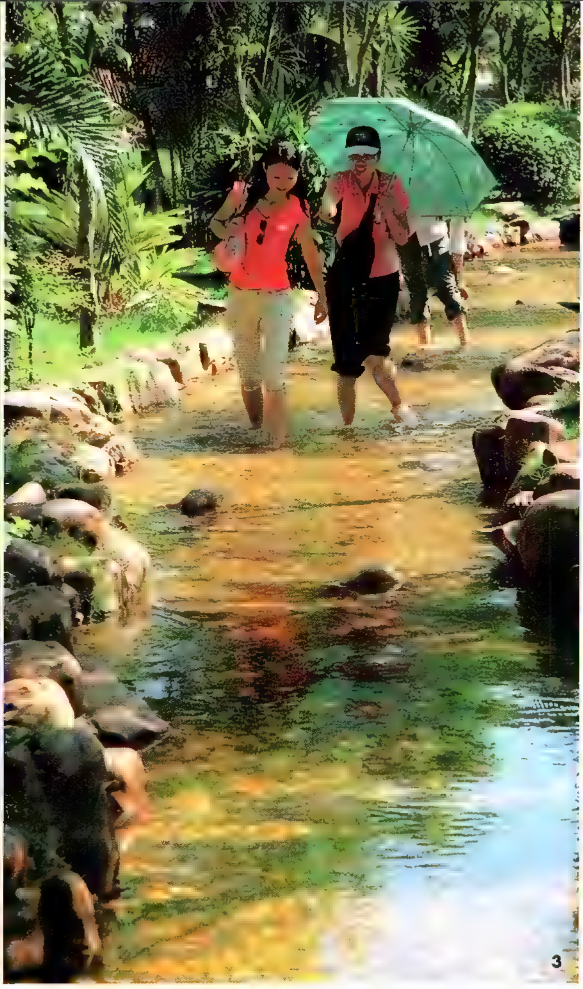




Tianhu Paradise — Place of the Gods

Just about one kilometre from Sandie Springs, Tianhu (Heaven Lake) scenic area is reached. It has everything you could want — breathtaking views, excellent food, leisure and recreation, even conference facilities all wrapped up in an eco-tourism area.

Here you'll find a unique wooden bridge that has 108 different shaped drums on both sides – the only one of its kind in Guangdong Province. Tourists can hit the drum hard and a deep rich sound reverberates around the entire mountain. It's hard not to feel like a king or warrior from some bygone era.

The best thing about a summer visit to Tianhu is the water. There are pebbled creeks, small rivers for boat-rowing, and a huge (3,000 square metres) free-shaped outdoor splash pool, the perfect respite for summer heat. The innumerable flowers and plants at Tianhu Lake bloom in a profusion of colour in the warmer months, enough to remind you the wonders of nature and put all worries out of your mind.

A little further on lies the petite resort hotel — with only eight suites, each room faces the natural Qiancengyan (Thousand-Layer Rock) Waterfall, bringing a pleasant murmur of water into every room, washing away one's troubles. The stream flows from the mountain top to the rocks, cascading in layers, looking like white bolts of silk from afar, plunging vertically, spraying and splashing wherever they may fall, as if a broken strands of pearl necklaces, raining from the sky...

But where is the "Heaven Lake"? It is in fact the reservoir located at the Niujiaokeng Dam at the top of Naobei Mountain. Tianhu is not just about sedate sightseeing, adrenaline junkies are also spoilt for choice here — with bungee jumping, rowing, archery, shooting, fishing, rock-climbing and other activities. Because everything — be it food and drink, leisure and recreation, touring or accommodation is at hand.

If you think "Food is everything" (as the Chinese saying goes), the terrific cuisine of "Shunde No.1" at Tianhu Lake Gourmet City would not disappoint. The restaurant - embraced by willow fronds, is built on the water, with organic farm produce as its mainstay. Everything belongs in the "green food" category, from the signature free range chicken, to the hotpot... the authentic Shunde cuisine has foodies coming back for more. Try the popular snack — Tianhu Lake's hand-made beancurd-pudding, prepared from natural spring water and premium soybeans from northeastern China.

Even the gods would be jealous of the indulgence at this "Heaven Lake".

1. Mountain streams cascade from the mountain — splashing like strands of pearl necklace breaking.

2. Tianhu's No.1 Shunde Restaurant lets you enjoy the scenery and authentic Shunde farm fare.

3. Beat the summer blues with a stroll along the pebble laid creeks.

4. The petite resort may have only eight rooms, but each faces the waterfall, so you can listen to its amazing sounds without setting foot outside.

5. Shunde Farm Chicken smells and tastes as wonderful as it looks. (by Kristy Wong)

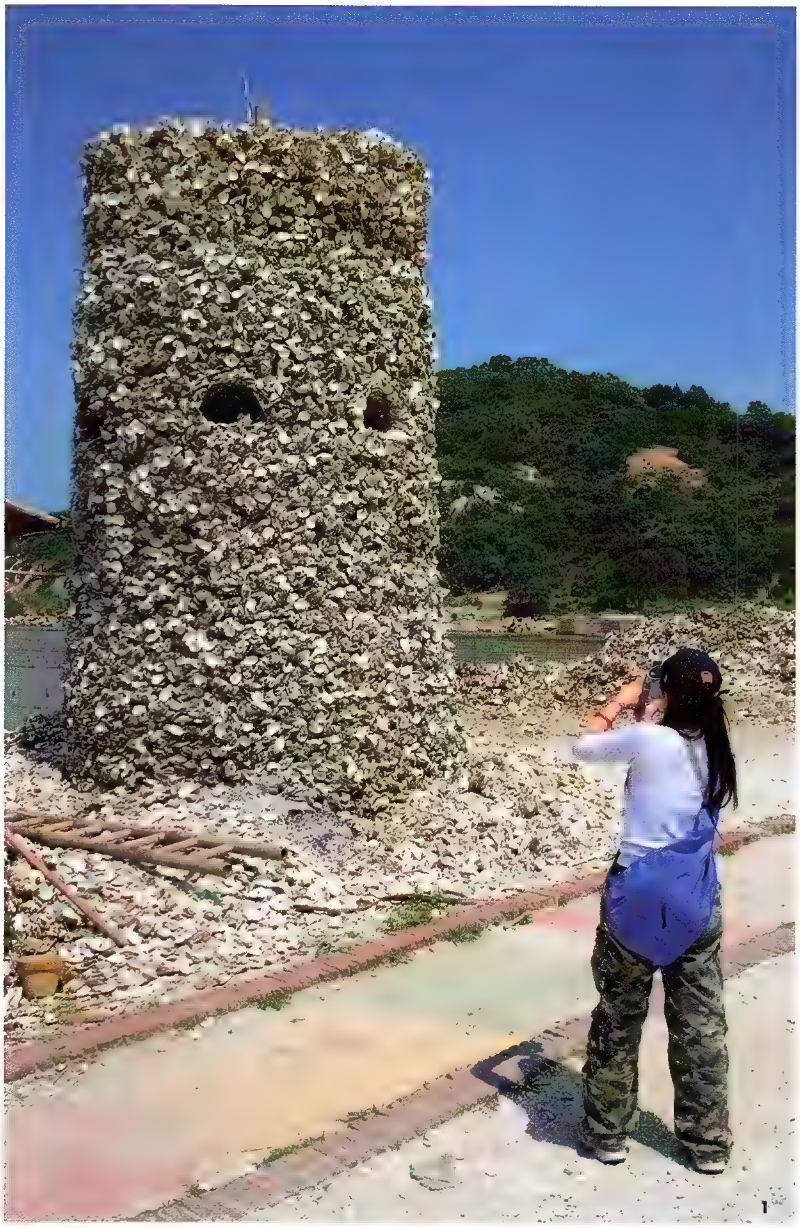
The "Oyster" Awards

One thing all friends tell me is that a visit to Zhuhai is not complete without trying Hengqin oysters, so why not do as the Romans do? The most famous oyster house has to be Hengqin Oyster Ecological Park. It's a special tourist attraction that is all about oysters — visitors can see how they're cultivated, processed, cooked and — most important of all- finally get to eat them!

The first thing that you see at the Oyster Ecological Park is a wide expanse of oyster fields, the path littered with grey and white oysters shells (there's a thick layer even on the roof!). At the factory, the workers are shucking the larger than palm-size oysters, what a sight! A creamy glistening oyster, weighing 100 grams. We learned that because Hengqin is surrounded by the sea, at the confluence of saltwater and freshwater, it's perfect for oysters. There are three ways of cultivating oysters — placing the shell on stones, hanging the shells, or placing the larvae bamboo sticks into the sand. Oyster farming is not easy — the entire cycle takes three years: the first year is spent cultivating the larvae until they reach maturity in the second year, but it's not until the third year that they harvest. The best time for eating oysters is from early winter to the following spring, once the weather cools, oysters grow plump and juicy, enough to make one's mouth water. Hengqin's oysters have earned the name of "milk of the sea" and have five qualities: large, plump, white, tender, and crunchy.

At our host's generosity, we tried a few specialty dishes at the semi al fresco restaurant — which boasts two of Zhuhai's top 10 dishes!

Hengqin oysters are not just plump in size, but tender and juicy in texture. Because the water around Hengqin Island is just right for oysters, each November to the following April is the best time for eating oysters.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1. Oyster shells are also used as decoration, this huge oyster tower was built using more than 27,000 shells.

2. Each raw oyster is about the size of an adult's palm.

3. Oyster eco-farm's products are well known in Hong Kong, Macau and Zhuhai.

Stones Worth Reading — Stone Garden

Perhaps it's my upbringing — I spent some time on an island as a child, but I have a particular fondness for stones. When friends come visit and see my "rock collection", they always call me a "rock expert".

But even I was rendered speechless and deeply impressed by the 38,900 rocks of varying sizes, shapes, even personalities at the Stone Garden on Hengqin Island. A huge eagle rock — as if about to take off in flight, greeted us and kept us enthralled, which — on close inspection, bore a resemblance to the shape of the map of China, hence its name "rising China". Up ahead was the "world's no.1 rockery display": made up of 10,000 lingbi rocks and eagle rocks, with pavilions and platforms, a plethora of interesting rocks, set in a pool of water. Even more unusual, there is a stage near the rockery, with daily performances. Audiences are often mesmerized by the sight of *kung fu* masters flying overhead, accompanied by the thrills and spills of fountains and explosions, enough to bring on thunderous applause.

The Chinese have long had an affinity with stones — fairytales and legends such as Nuwa Mending The Sky, Jingwei Filling The Sea, and The Story of the Stone... all involve stones and therefore stones are associated with imagination. Now as people's personal wealth grows, stone collecting has become fashionable. I've seen stones valued at millions even tens of millions of dollars! Some stones are so treasured by their owners they wouldn't dream of ever selling them. Indeed, isn't the earth we inhabit just a stone? They pre-date our existence, in fact, stones are the real "antiques".

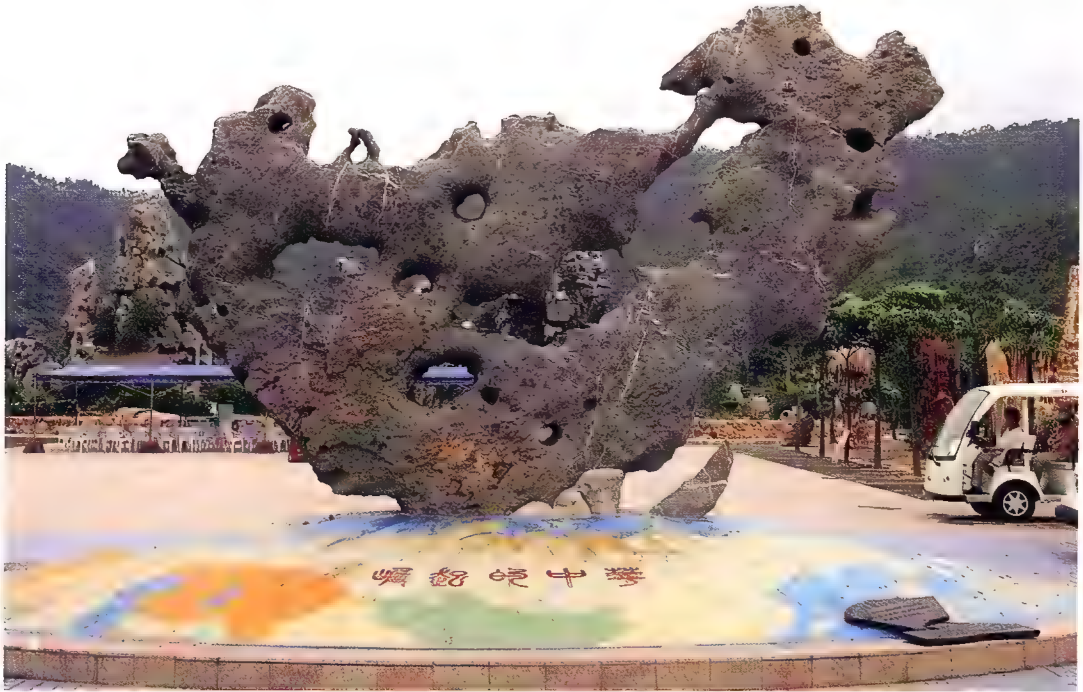
Mr Deng, the owner of Stone Garden is a total "stone buff". He amassed his fortunes from stones, then a few years ago he invested 110 million yuan to build this Stone Garden of more than 600,000 square metres, housing a collection of about 38,900 rare stones from all over China. There are eagle rocks from Yingde of Guangdong, Lingbi rocks from Anhui, Taihu rocks from Suzhou, yellow stone from Hainan, limestone from caves in Guangxi, agate from the Gobi desert of Inner Mongolia, Fengling rock from Xinjiang... The most breathtaking was a row of dozens of stone dogs from Zhanjiang's Leizhou Peninsula — some are only two feet high, some about the size of a watermelon, these age-old dogs made from stone have unique "expressions": some look dazed, others look silly, or mischievous, or even mean. The "Stone Appreciation Hall" showcases the more unusual stones, the most amazing is perhaps the huge bladder stones weighing more than a hundred kilos! Those who feel a spiritual connection with stones can pay their respects to religious stone objects at the "Stone Worship Hall" — where sexual relics in stone are also displayed.

The stone-carved "Qing" is an ancient Chinese instrument, made from Liongbi rock from Anhui Province in the Ying Dynasty — 3,000 years ago, and was used in offering and worship ceremonies for emperors. Today you can personally experience this ancient instrument at the Stone Garden. Even more unbelievable is how Stone Garden has managed to transport the classical Chinese gardens of Suzhou here too! For a moment one would be fooled into thinking this was a scene from the famed river towns of the lower Yangtze — somewhere in Suzhou or Hangzhou perhaps?

1. Stone Garden has even got limestone from caves.

2. The piece de resistance – "Rising China" eagle rock stands on the world map, symbolizing the country's growing stature.

3. Take a boat and enjoy cruising the reed marshes of Ocean Paradise.



Back To Nature — Ocean Paradise

The first time we went to Ocean Paradise there was a typhoon, the boatman said: as soon as you get out to sea, you'll be fish food...after which we beat a hasty retreat.

We were met with nicer weather on our second visit that allowed us to tour the entire park. Ocean Paradise-Blue Coast is now China's largest marine wetlands eco-park, with 4,500 Chinese acres of mangrove forests, sometimes called "forests of the sea", extending to as far as the eye could sea — a splendid sight. Connected to the mangroves are endless reed marshes. When you are in a boat cruising amidst reed marshes with the sea breeze caressing your face, you feel closer than ever to Mother Nature.

Mangroves are also known as "earth's kidney" or "purifier for the sea" and the forest at Ocean Paradise is the biggest mangrove forest I've seen, reminding me of another mangrove forest in Shenzhen. Because of property development near the mangroves, the deterioration in soil quality, water quality and the air has led Shenzhen's mangrove to shrink and die... we hope this environmental disaster isn't repeated at other mangrove forests.

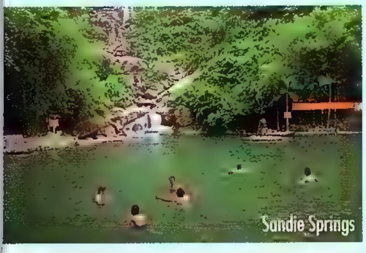
For some strange reason the species known as "red mangrove" is actually green, but it's so called because the juices from these shrubbery are initially creamy white, but once oxidized they turn red. These mangroves are a species native to southern China and are relatively smaller than those found in western countries.

The Marine Life Museum at Ocean Paradise is great for learning about marine life and there are specimens of over a hundred fish, shrimp and crabs. The most precious is a Chinese white dolphin — one of China's most endangered species.

A visit to Ocean Paradise is like a fun lesson in marine conservation and understanding about the ocean.

Translated by Cheng Lei

Hengqin Island Travel Tips



Sandie Springs

Stone Garden

Reed Marshes

Zhuhai – Hengqin Transport

Public Buses:

No. 14 bus from Fenghuang Bei to Hengqin Town

No. 62 bus from Yuanming Xinyuan Garden to Stone Garden

(Mini-bus) Xiangzhou Port to Hengqin Town

(Mini-bus on Hengqin Island) No. 63 from Hengqin town to Ocean Paradise

Admissions:

Sandie Springs ~ 15 yuan

Stone Garden ~ 60 yuan

Package Ticket: 60 yuan

Tianhu ~ 18 yuan

Ocean Paradise ~ 15 yuan

Cuisine:

1. Zhandian Country Chicken Restaurant

Add: At the side of Zhuhai Hengqin Stone Garden (around 300 metres to the right of Hengqin Bridge)

Tel: (756) 868 8998 Fax: (756) 858 8558

2. No. 1 Shunde Restaurant

Add: Niujiaokeng, opposite to the entrance of Tianhu scenic area.

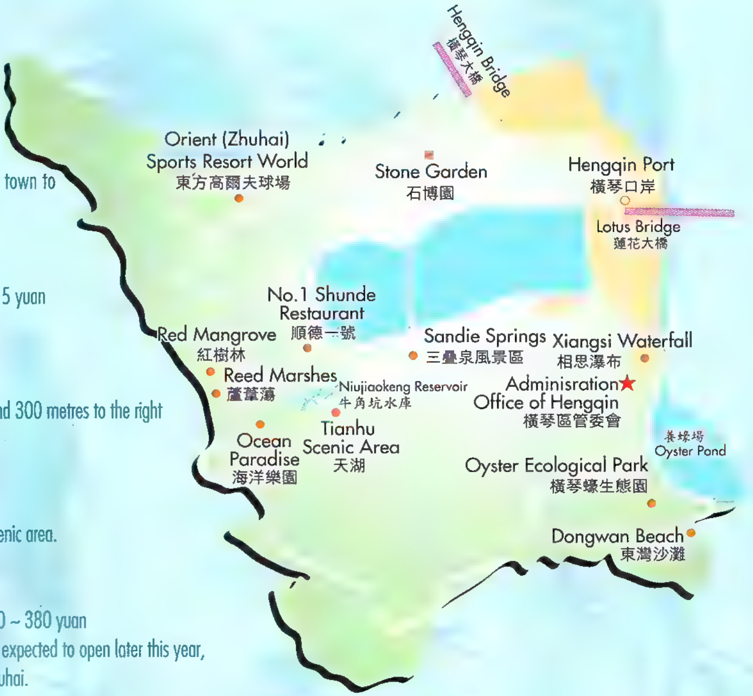
Accommodation:

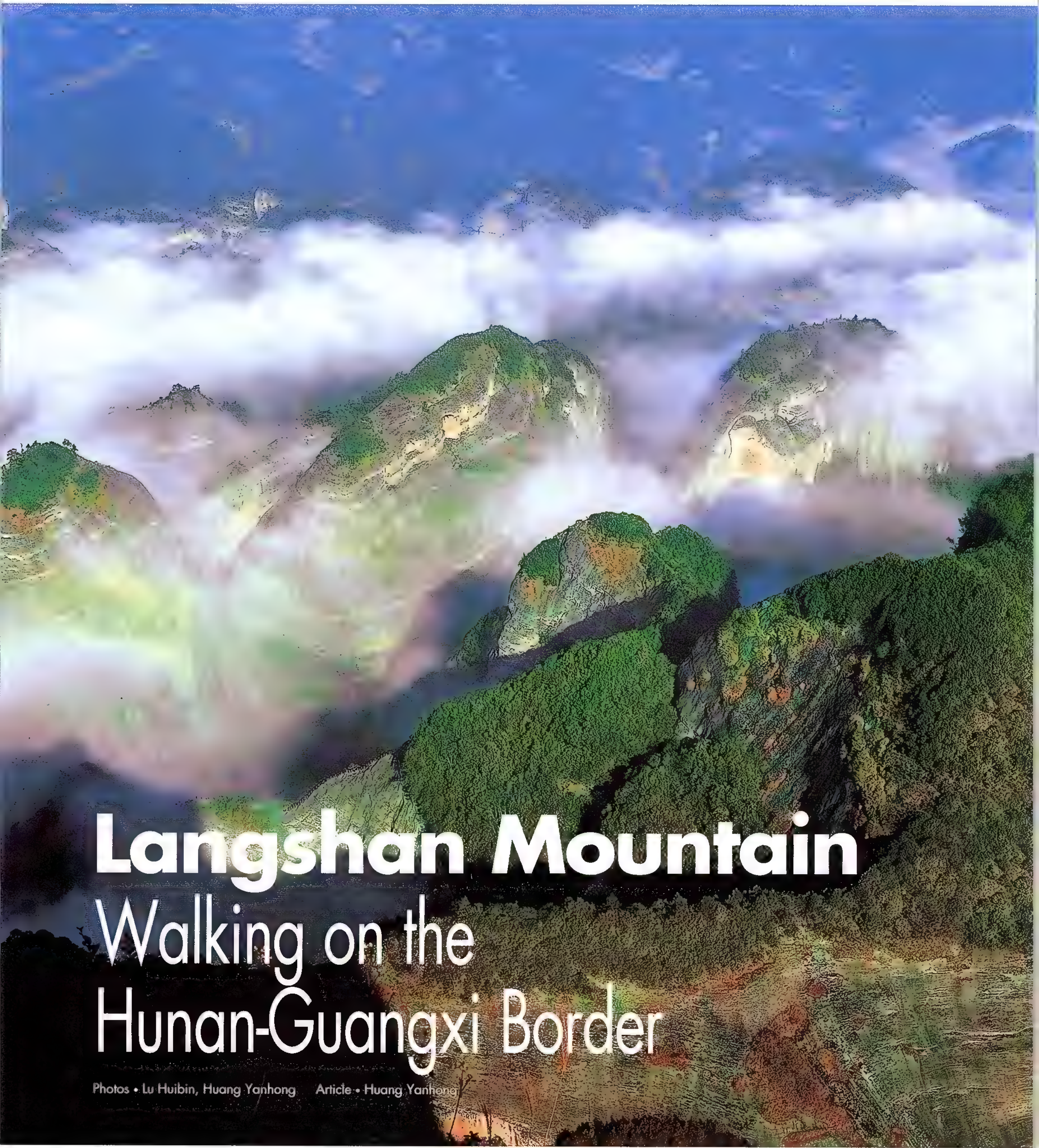
Tianhu Hotel

Rates: Deluxe Suite 350 ~ 500 yuan, double-room 260 ~ 380 yuan

Tips: The Lotus Bridge that links Hengqin and Macau is expected to open later this year, tourists are more easy to travel between Macau and Zhuhai.

Websites: www.zhsdq.com / www.tianhuzh.com / www.hengqin.org

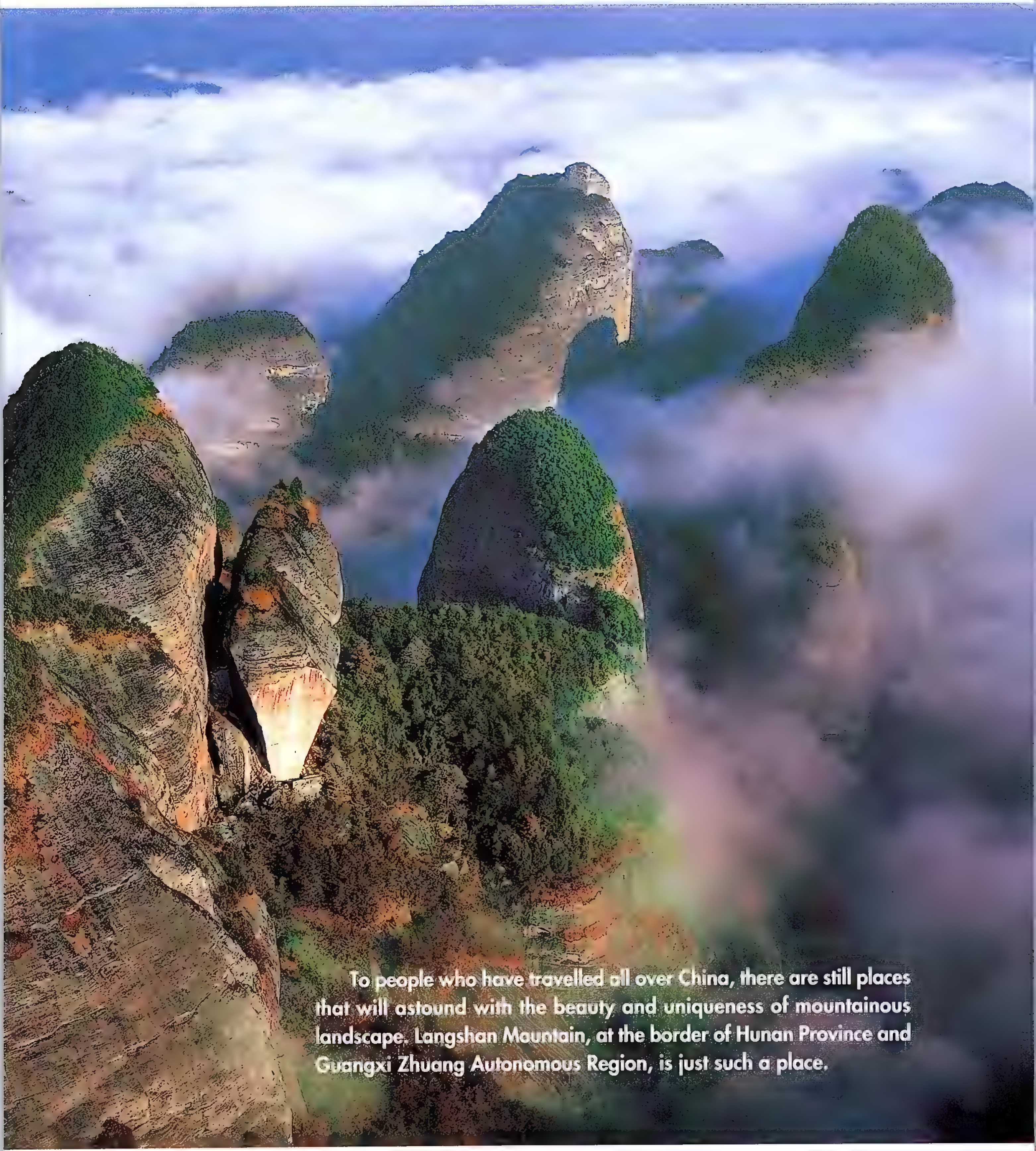

Hengqin Bridge
橫琴大橋
Orient (Zhuhai) Sports Resort World
東方高爾夫球場
Stone Garden
石博園
Hengqin Port
橫琴口岸
Lotus Bridge
蓮花大橋
No.1 Shunde Restaurant
順德一號
Red Mangrove
紅樹林
Sandie Springs
三疊泉風景區
Xiangsi Waterfall
相思瀑布
Reed Marshes
蘆葦蕩
Niujiaokeng Reservoir
牛角坑水庫
Adminisration Office of Hengqin
橫琴區管委會
Tianhu Scenic Area
天湖
Ocean Paradise
海洋樂園
養蠔場
Oyster Pond
Oyster Ecological Park
橫琴蠔生態園
Dongwan Beach
東灣沙灘



Langshan Mountain

Walking on the Hunan-Guangxi Border

Photos • Lu Huibin, Huang Yanhong   Article • Huang Yanhong



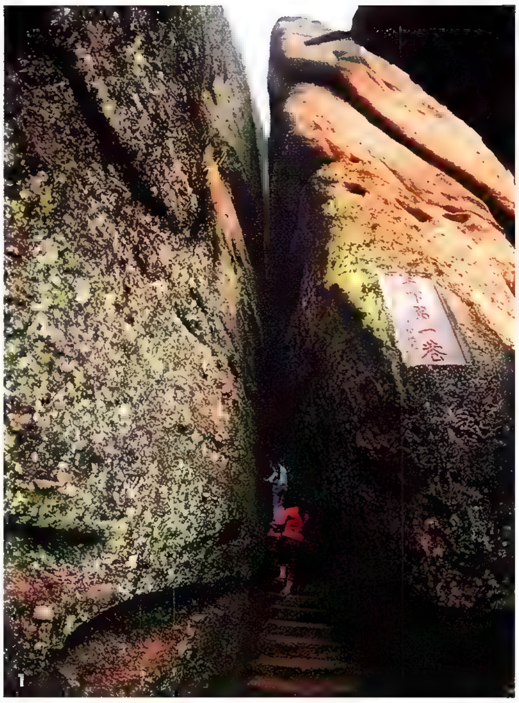
To people who have travelled all over China, there are still places that will astound with the beauty and uniqueness of mountainous landscape. Langshan Mountain, at the border of Hunan Province and Guangxi Zhuang Autonomous Region, is just such a place.

Approximately 400 million years ago, this area at the border of Hunan and Guangxi was pushed up out of the ocean only to be plunged back into the ocean depths. This repeated dozens of time over millions of years until 200 million years ago the current formation of Langshan Mountain appeared.

Treacherous Narrow Paths

Located in Hunan Province, Niu Bi Zhai (Ox Nose Village) is one of Langshan's most typical scenery areas. Here over 20 different famous rock formations and natural sights form a scenic area worth visiting.

From Xinning County in Hunan Province I took a tourist coach into the Langshan Scenic Area. The weather was violently hot so you can imagine our sweat and gasps as we ascended the mountain. After passing waterfalls and up through narrow staircases perched precariously on the cliff faces, we arrived at Chu Tian Pavilion. From here we looked up through a narrow gap in a massive boulder, the so-called "World's Narrowest Pathway". Walking into the gap, my shoulders were already brushing against the sides. In the unfortunate event where I met another person coming down, there was no room for either of us to pass. We could only hug each other and swivel around till we had swapped places. Emerging from the gap, we continued to scale the peak while admiring the views of the Fuyi River below.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Border Struggles

Our destination on this trip was Ba Jiao Zhai (Eight Corners Village). We had hired a well-known local tourist guide Li Luming from the Huang Bei Village at the foot of the mountain. Li was sturdy and able, and highly knowledgeable about the region and its people.

1. A narrow gap leads the way. (by Huang Yanhong)

2. Dangerous mountain paths await the traveller on the Guangxi side. (by Huang Yanhong)

3. On a clear morning after rain; the sea of clouds appears. (by Lu Huibin)

2

This spot lay on the exact border of Guangxi and Hunan. The peak area wasn't big, but two temples were perched on what land was available. Yun Tai Temple lay on the Hunan side while Tian Gong Temple belonged to Guangxi.

Today, the border appears quite and peaceful, and yet many years ago the temples were scenes of intense border rivalry. When the area first opened to tourism, the temples fought between each other for tourist traffic, stealing each other's property and even committing arson on each other's temple buildings. In the end, the news of the fracas reached the central government who issued a statement directing the two sides to share the resources equally and work together to develop tourism.

An elder in the Yun Tai Temple told me that today the two temples get along well and a neutral zone of 12 km in enforced on either side of the border.

Test of Courage

Thirty metres from the lookout platform, the mountain scenery takes an extremely steep plunge. At the top of this fall is a small temple called the "Dragon's Head". This is the pride of the village for its sheer drop — 10 times more dangerous than the more famous plunge at Wudang Mountain.

As for myself, I chose to admire the dangerous plunge from afar. Even many villagers are afraid to visit the temple, although our guide Li Luming is one of the few who have been across.

I asked Li how many times he had been to the temple, and he answered "countless". Due to the difficulty in getting there, lighting incense at the Dragon's Head is said to be particularly efficacious; thus many people have asked Li to light incense for them. Li said that last year he had helped light incense for a girl from Guilin who had lost her boyfriend and was having problems at work. A year later, the girl visited again to say thanks — now she had a new boyfriend who was a PhD and she herself had been promoted at work!

For safety, the area has now been sealed off so even hardy souls are unable to go across and light incense. One of the travellers in our group, a young man, told me he had visited many times. Several years ago on their first trip, he decided to display his courage and climb up to the "Dragon's Head". One of the girls in their tour group at the time, burst into tears and pleaded for him to come back. Later on, the two fell in love. The young man pointed at the girl next

to him: "Now, she's my wife."

Courage, however, doesn't earn a living, thus Li used to take photos at the spot to get by. Who knew the authorities would confiscate his camera? Speaking of this incident today, Li's face clouds over in a rueful grimace.

Up the Mountain Again

From Langshan I travelled on to Ziyuan County in Guangxi Zhuang Autonomous Region with the hope of seeing the famous sight of a "sea of clouds" from the top one of the soaring peaks. My chance came on a fine day to climb Langshan from the Guangxi side.

At midday I set off for Meixi Town, passing through numerous vignettes of countryside scenery: karst mountains, paddy fields, clear streams, an old man fishing ... idyllic scenes of a world away from modern life.

From Meixi Town it was a quick turn into the scenic area entrance. The ticket seller told me the views were more spectacular from this side, though the journey was a little more arduous.

A blank wall of rock lay in front of me with curving pathways and stairways criss-crossing the mountain. It was startling and certainly as fearsome as the legendary Huashan Mountain. By the time I had reached a rest point, I was dripping with sweat and puffing with exhaustion. Before me lay a narrow stone staircase ascending as if to Heaven itself. This place was called the "Dragon's Spine" and a pathway led away to the "Descending Dragon Nunnery". I took a rest at a little shop and the shopkeeper told me the shop was used as an undercover police station guarding against bandits in the 1950s.

I didn't meet any bandits, though I did meet a nice bowl of cold noodles with wide vegetables as a snack. The shopkeeper told me she lives at the bottom of the mountain and climbs up every day to tend the shop. Next to the shop lay a vegetable patch from which she makes the noodles by grinding vegetable leaves into a paste, adding mountain spring water and refrigerating till set. The noodles were delicious and by the time we had finished chatting I had three empty bowls before me.

Bandits!

With a full belly I continued up the mountain and reached Yun Tai Temple on the summit by dusk.

The temple was undergoing reconstruction and thus only a temporary tent was available for this humble visitor. An old man Li Yangcheng was guarding over the place and told me there currently weren't any priests in the temples, only two watchmen, though there were plans to hire a priest.

I asked him: "Why not do it yourself?" but he held up his hands protesting he was too old and couldn't read the characters in the prayer books.

The old man's job is to look after the worshippers coming to pray and sometimes he cooks simple meals for them: "It's not easy to come here and pray. There is also an admittance fee, but luckily it's been reduced recently to 20 yuan. Our main fear is the collections box: people make donations but the authorities don't come quick enough to take it for banking, leaving it at risk from robbers. The box has already been robbed four times. The first time they took 13,000 yuan. Last weekend, they took 2,000. We heard a noise outside but we didn't dare come out as there was a whole gang of them. They kicked and hit the lock on the box to open it, and in the end they just carried it off. We discovered the chain had been cut later. Our salaries were docked for that, but what could we do? There's no way we could fight them."

Hearing this, I couldn't help but be a little worried. What if the robbers came again? We talked it over and agreed that if something should happen we would talk loudly and make lots of noise in the tent so that the robbers would think there were many people. That should be enough to scare them away.

Just as I was nodding off, there was a howl from a dog and I sat up like a bolt. I didn't hear anything else and started nodding off again, when came another howl. This went on all night, but at least we were saved from a meeting with the robbers.

In the distance the first light of dawn appeared and the dog cries stopped. Li came back inside to tell me some bad news — there was no "sea of clouds" this morning.

Mountain Songs on the Fuyi River

Apart from mountain scenery, Langshan is also blessed with river scenes on the Fuyi River.

1. Pastoral scenery at the foot of Langshan Mountain. (by Lu Huibin)

2. A walk through the village brings a touch of country life. (by Lu Huibin)

3. From the Guangxi side, Langshan Mountain is as splendid as ever. (by Huang Yanhong)

1. Rafting on the Fuyi River is a popular tourist attraction. (by Huang Yanhong)

Fuyi River rises in Guangxi and is one of the highlights of the Langshan scenic area. The water here is calm and placid and along the riverside there are over 20 places of interesting rock formations.

At the dock we boarded a bamboo raft and set off downstream. The water was crystal clear and the bottom of the river sparkled with smooth stones reflecting sunlight from above. Sunrays reflected off the bamboo forest on the opposite bank bringing a golden haze over our own little boat.

Our boatsman was named Li and was a local resident proficient in the local singing style. Once we heard that we implored him to sing one for us. He laid down his punting pole and began: "A wooden plank, three yards long, in the middle a bride and groom, a groom and bride, but no matchmaker to be found anywhere around ..." His song brought cheers from the other boats going down the river and, encouraged, the boatsman sung on. Amid the sweet countryside songs, our raft floated down the river until we pulled aside a small boat with several cormorants perched on the side. The boat owner told us the birds had fouled up the boat and he was now washing it down. The cormorants looked on, enjoying the sunshine and with little thought to the hard work they were causing for their master.

The boat owner was also employed by the scenic area to clean up the river banks and report illegal fishing. He received 1,000 yuan per month and also did a little fishing in his spare time. He has been raising cormorants for over 20 years and though they were less efficient as fish catchers, they still needed to practice to keep in shape.

Translated by Bret Sutcliffe

Travel Tips

Transportation

By air: There are frequent flights to and from Changsha, capital city of Hunan Province.

Train: There are train service to Changsha from many cities of China.

Bus: Changsha to Langshan (395 km) costs 85 yuan and takes 5.5 hours; from Guilin to Langshan (140 km) costs 36 yuan and takes 3 hours.

Admissions

Langshan on Hunan side: World's Narrowest Pathway 50 yuan, Rafting Down Fuyi River 65 yuan, Lajiao Peak 36 yuan, Eight Corners Village 40 yuan, Zixia Cave 30 yuan.

Entry to Eight Corners Village: 40 yuan

Combined Tickets: 217 yuan (includes World's Narrowest Pathway, Fuyi River, Eight Corners Village and 5 scenic sights)

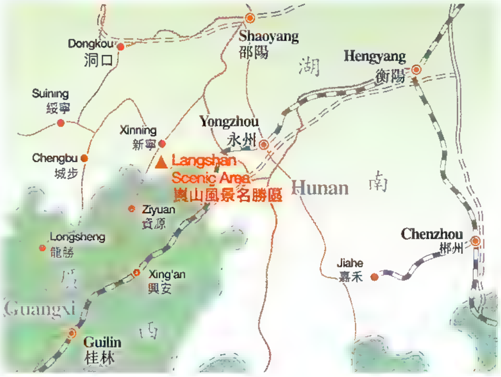
Accommodation

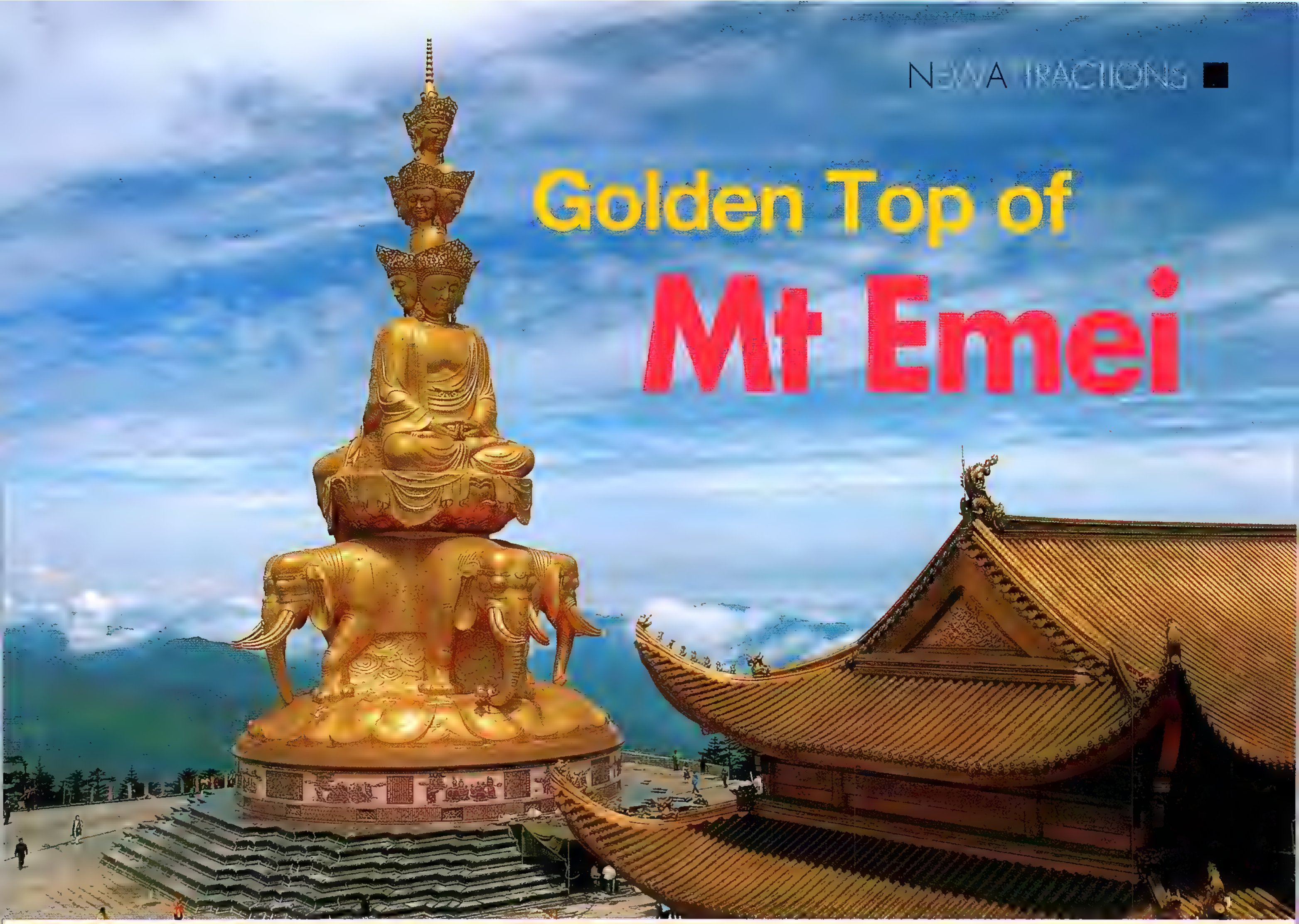
Hong Ji Hotel (4-star) in Xinning County, Hunan Province

A standard room costs 400 yuan; other 2-3 star hotels costs 100-160 yuan per room.

Family-run hotels are also available at 60-80 yuan per room. Simple lodging in Meixi Country, Guangxi Province costs 10 yuan per person. There is no formal lodging on the mountain peak but a temporary bed can be negotiated for 10 yuan per person.

Soaring peaks and miraculous mountain scenery from Eight Corner Village (by Lu Huibin)





Golden Top of Mt Emei

I have to confess that I do not know much about Mt Emei except a few fictional characters described in martial arts books. Nonetheless, hearing all these names is already tempting enough for one to embark on a journey to this mysterious mountain. Today, I finally have the pleasure of visiting Mt Emei. However, what really impresses me is the awe-inspiring grandeur of its newly refurbished "golden top"!

Photos & Article · Suzan So

Mt Emei, Mt Wutai, Mt Putuo and Mt Jiuhua are known as China's four greatest Buddhist mountains. Of all the temples on Mt Emei, Jinding, or Golden Top, standing 3,077 metres above sea level, is the most famous and a must-see for tourists, since it is where Huazang Temple is erected with a huge gold statue of Samantabhadra (Puxian Bodhisattva). Samantabhadra was right-hand assistant of the Sakyamuni Buddha. Samantabhadra is revered as the patron bodhisattva of the monasteries associated with Mt Emei.

The Brightest Buddha in the World

Following the steps, it took me about another 10 minutes to reach Huazang Temple. I had to try my best to look up to see the 48-metre-tall statue of Samantabhadra. Its dais is ornamented by granite bas-relief. On its four sides engraved the 10 deeds of Samantabhadra. The entire statue weighs 660 tons and is the world's tallest golden Buddha. Under the scorching sun the Buddha glittered with blinding rays which made me feel giddy for quite a while.

The Jinding Worship Square centres on the golden statue of Samantabhadra, surrounded by the golden, silver and bronze halls as well as the immaculate worship avenue. The cloud was very sick and the sunshine harsh. In order to get closer to the sky, I climbed a six-level granite platform, using my hands and feet. Now looking into the distance, I felt as if I had entered the fairyland and my heart was filled with brightness and effulgence. I then walked quietly to the Ravine of Renouncing the Self, where it is said some people were brought to a sudden awakening by the "Buddha's light" and jump from it, becoming Buddhas. However, looking down the unfathomable abyss, all I could feel was unbearable chill and I had to find my way out as soon as I could. To gain a better view of Jinding, one might wish to stay a bit farther and higher from it. An alternate way would be from the Top of Myriad Buddhas situated at 3,099 metres above sea level, where one could see the hills rise and fall and the clouds locking in.

Upon my arrival at Jinding, everyone was busy preparing for the Grand Ceremony of Consecrating Newly Completed Idols scheduled on June 18. Although it was filled with dust and the temples were under construction, one could nonetheless still feel their fervent belief in their religion. Some would put their palms together to chant scriptures; some would prostrate themselves and kowtow in worship.

1. The gold statue of Samantabhadra is the tallest of its kind in the world.

The Special Wannian Temple

There are numerous temples on Mt Emei. However, among them the India-styled Wannian (Ten-Thousand Years) Temple stands out. The construction of Wannian Temple first started during the Eastern Jin Dynasty (317—420) and is therefore believed to be the earliest temple on Mt Emei. The most eye-catching sight in the hall is the statue of Samantabhadra Riding on White Elephant, worshipped in the Hall Without Beams and Bricks. It is the biggest bronze statue of Samantabhadra in China. I was told that both of the elephant's eyes used to be made of jewels. The left eye, however, has been stolen and a glass bead was installed in its place. Yet to me, there did not seem to exist much difference.

500 Arhats at Fuhu Temple

Fuhu (Subduing Tiger) Temple was built during the Southern Song Dynasty (1127—1279). And it is from the shape of the mountain which resembles a reclining tiger that it gets its name. When it was first built, Fuhu Temple was one of the largest temples on Mt Emei. Surrounded by thick forests, the temple is blessed with a most tranquil environment. Inside it, the Hall of 500 arhats is a must for tourists. It is said that a visit should randomly pick an arhat and then walk on according to his or her age. And the arhat one stops at is the one he or she is bonded by fate to meet. By reading the commentary of the arhat, one could get to know his or her characters and fortune (only in Chinese). However, I do believe in one saying: If you want to know about your past life, it is what that makes your present life; if you wish to know your next life, mark what you do in this life."

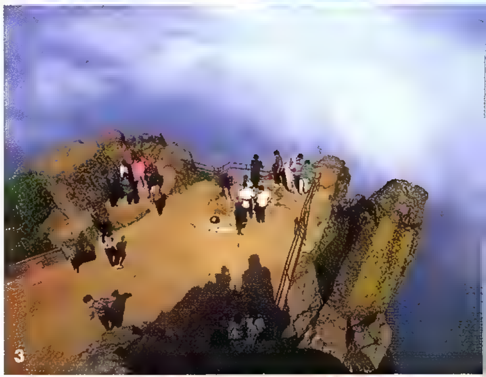
Buddhist Lecture at Baoguo Temple

Baoguo Temple is only about 1,000 metres from Fuhu Temple. It is perhaps the most famous of all. It is the biggest temple on Mt Emei and also the most often visited. It was built during the Ming period but was endowed its current name by the Qing Emperor Kangxi, who took the meaning of repaying the favour of the state and the emperor. The most noted activity in the temple is the Buddhism lecture which only started fairly recently. Led by the abbot himself, monks teach the public about Buddhism and the correct way to pray to the Buddha or to chant scriptures. Attention has been paid to even the most minute detail and I really hope by doing this they will further spread the spirit of Samantabhadra. It costs 100 yuan to take part and the fee also pays for a hermit robe and a cup of Emei Zen tea. Indeed an opportunity for whoever wants to find out more about Buddhism.

Beyond Chanting

After praying to the Buddha, please do not forget to visit the Qingyin (Clear Sound)

2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Court, where rivers, mountain trails all provide a perfect opportunity to get away from city. Moreover, a natural protection zone can also be found there. Hundreds of monkeys have colonised the hill, who, depending on your luck, could be both lovely and despicable. During my tour, I saw a man wrestling with a monkey due to some "misunderstanding". In order to protect his handbag, he had to endure the pain of having his forearm bitten by the monkey. A friendly reminder: better keep them at bay, especially try not to tempt them. However, some monkeys are just so smart and cute.

Apart from being a pilgrimage spot for the Buddhists, Mt Emei is at the same time a very good place just to relax. For instance, there are spas around if you are tired of all the mountain-climbing during the day. Among them, Lingxiu Spa, Yujia Spa and Hongzhu Spa are perhaps the biggest. In turn, they also afford a better variety of options. If you are hungry, why not visit the culinary street by the Yujia River outside Mt Emei Hotel. There you will find Emei vegetarian dishes, snacks, pubs, Japanese or Korean restaurants. A visit to Emei is indeed a treat to both the body and the mind!

Translated by Hu Jun

1. To see the sea of clouds at Emei, one should need a little bit of luck. (by Chen Jin)

2. The "Buddha's light" is no different from a rainbow, both being deflections of light. It is said that when standing on the Ravine of Renouncing the Self at Jinding, one sometimes has the opportunity to see his own reflection in it. (China Tourism Photo Library)

3. Tourists are experiencing the supernatural power at the Ravine of Renouncing the Self of Jinding. (by Shi Baoxiu)

4. All of the arhats are meticulously made. It often takes a long time just to see all the details.

5. The statue of Samantabhadra riding a white elephant is perhaps the most important treasure in Mt Emei. It is 7.85 metres in height, 62 tons in weight, and placed in the middle of the Hall of Wannian Temple.

6. Monkeys at Emei are both cunning and lovely, making it hard for the tourists to stay away.

7. For those who are interested in Buddhism, attending such a lecture at Baoguo Temple affords a great opportunity. Afterwards, one will feel both relieved and inspired.

8. Sedan chair is a traditional means of transportation at Emei. All the sedan carriers have uniforms and the same pricing.

Travel Tips

Single Pass of Mt Emei: 120 yuan

Jinding Tram: Upwards, 40 yuan; downwards, 30 yuan

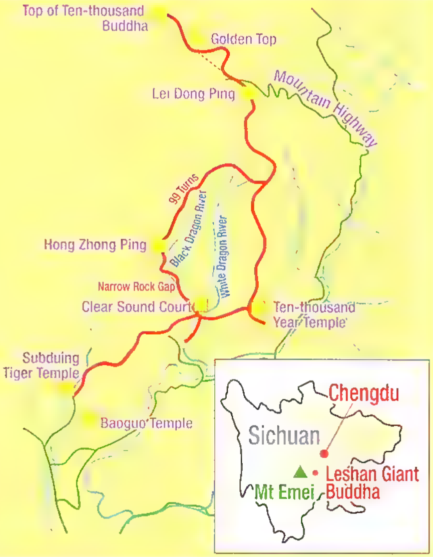
Huazang Temple (Golden Top): 10 yuan; Wannian Temple: 10 yuan; Baoguo Temple: 8 yuan; Fuhu Temple: 6 yuan

Hongzhu Spa: 128 yuan; Yujia Spa: 60 yuan; Lingquan Spa: 88~118 yuan

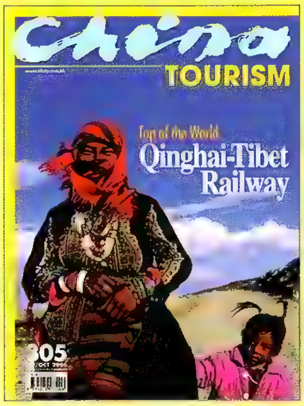
Plane tickets: From Hong Kong to Chengdu, Air China, Economy Class, Return Tickets at about HK$2,380

Transportation: From the Xinnanmen (New South Gate) Bus Terminal in Chengdu, there is a bus bound for Mt Emei. One bus every 20 minutes and the trip takes 2 hours. Fare priced at about 31 yuan

Special thanks to: Emeishan Management Committee Emeishan Travel Share Co., Ltd. (www.ems517.com), Jetour Holiday, Emeishan International Hotel, Emeishan Hotel



Mt Emei Scenic Area



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China Tourism always appreciates feedback from its readers. In accordance with your suggestions, we have recently added a variety of new columns. Still, we need to know more of your opinions, including criticisms and suggestions. Please take a couple of minutes to complete this questionnaire and return it to us. Thank you!

Please give your evaluation of the stories in this issue and your overall impression of *China Tourism*.

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Excursions II: Farms in Taiwan	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
Culture: Charming Guqin	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
Profile: Rebecca Lee — Still Me	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
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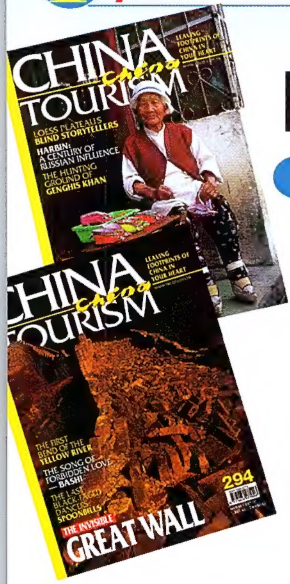

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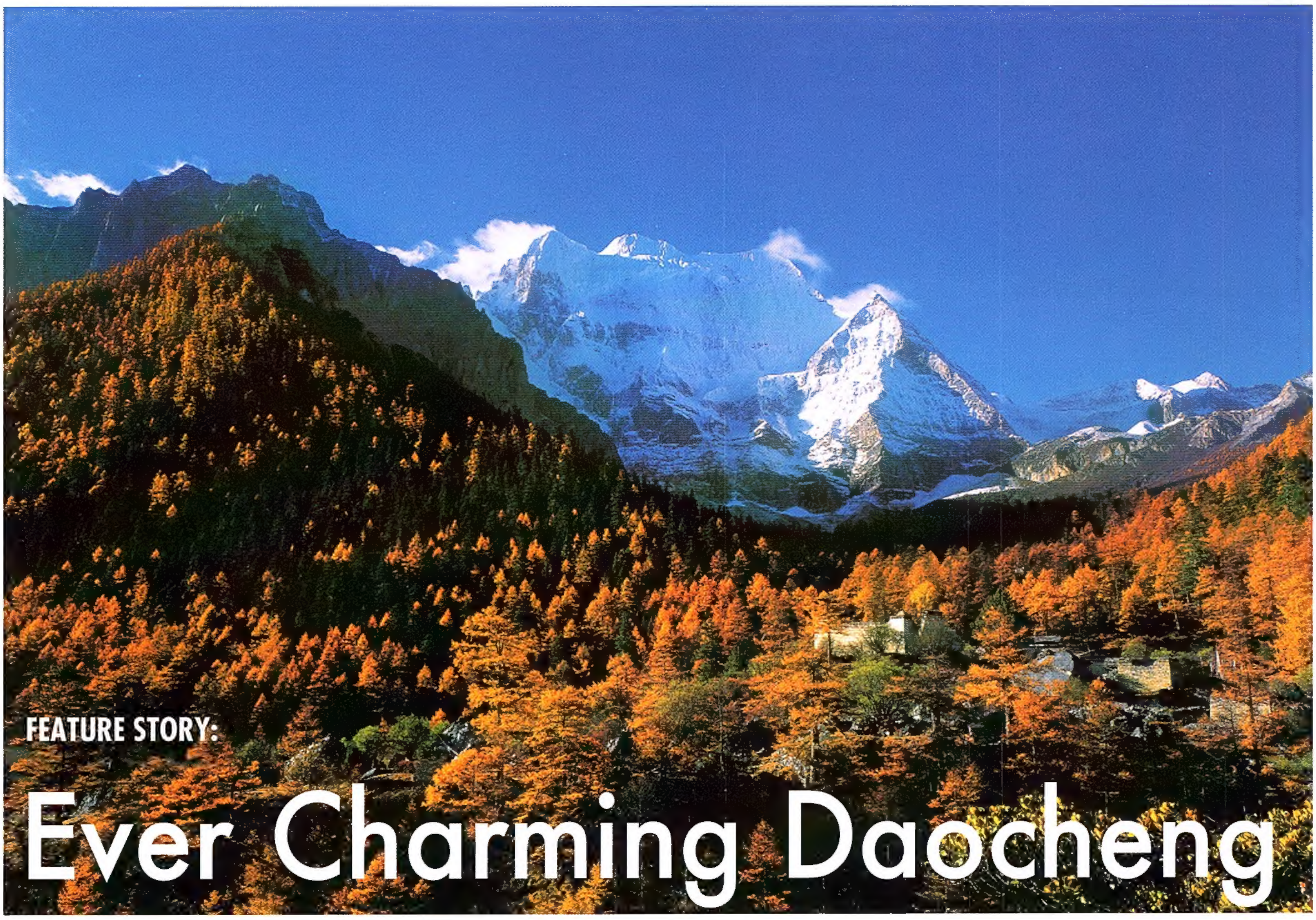


FEATURE STORY:

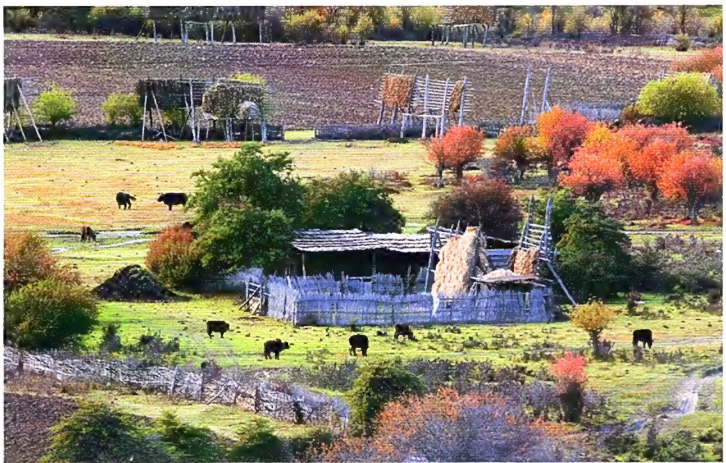
Ever Charming Daocheng

When it becomes too hot that every curious traveller dream to take a train to Tibet, have we forgotten that Daocheng in West China's Sichuan Province is also an everlasting beauty to different kinds of visitors — global photographers, worldly wanderers, experienced plant experts, or even spiritual monks? Whenever you come to Daocheng, you will be in love with this area — the truly last piece of haven on earth in both China and the world.

On the Way:

Shangri-La — Dream Come True

From flatland to the plateau, from Mt Yulong (Jade Dragon) to Songzanglin Monastery, from expansive emerald-green grasslands to a sea of azaleas, from tasting authentic *ziba* cakes in Lijiang ancient city to zipping Tibetan butter tea, and from family-run resorts of Naxi people to Tibetan villas on mountains, you are deserved to be well treated. Plus a deluxe Spa and rock massage — all to create a dreamy journey for you in Shangri-La, Yunnan Province.



Culture:

Getting to Know Jade

Jade (or *fei cui*) is praised as the "diamond of the Orient". It is naturally formed by the least-found type of rock in the world. Through hundreds of years, this beautiful kind of rock has mesmerized millions of people. Our reporter explores Yunnan Province in West China and northern part of its neighbouring country, Myanmar, to study on its mysterious history and captivating legends behind it.

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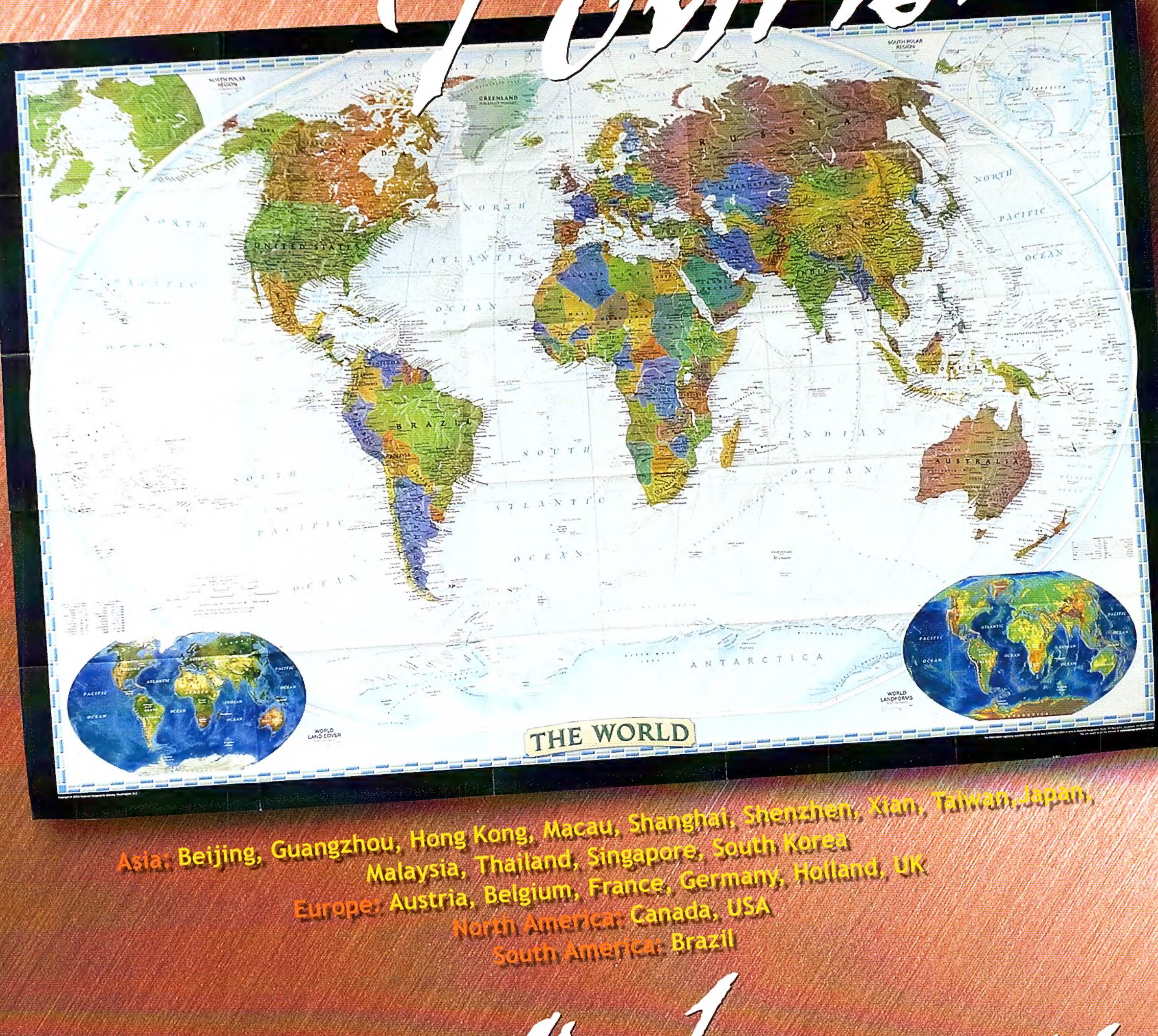

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